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OF THE HILLS**
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by CHARLES R.
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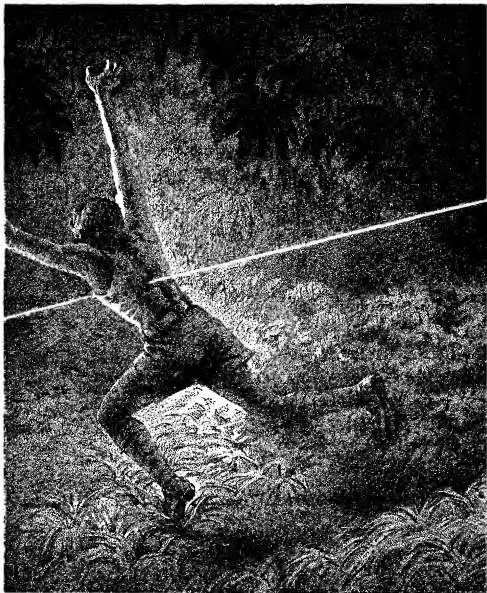
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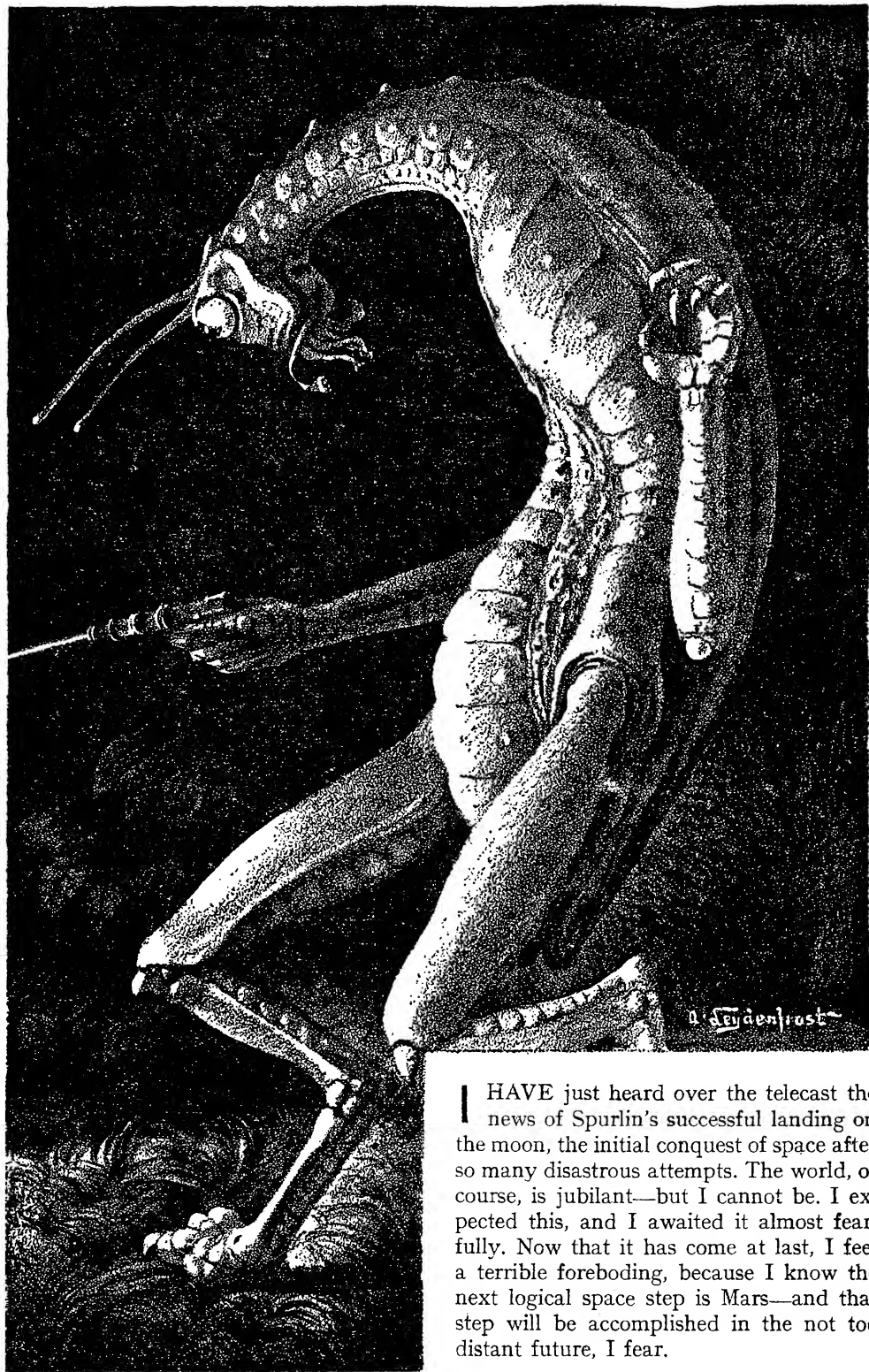
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MARS WARNING

By HENRY HASSE

What could it mean, that message from hostile Mars, the urgent warning to the human race? One man died because he was brave enough to wonder. But those who were strong enough to follow in his footsteps. . .





I HAVE just heard over the telecast the news of Spurlin's successful landing on the moon, the initial conquest of space after so many disastrous attempts. The world, of course, is jubilant—but I cannot be. I expected this, and I awaited it almost fearfully. Now that it has come at last, I feel a terrible foreboding, because I know the next logical space step is Mars—and that step will be accomplished in the not too distant future, I fear.

No wonder, then, that my mind flashes back to our discovery in the Venezuelan jungle five years ago. I wrote the story then, intending to publish it, but the others convinced me it would be best to withhold it until the proper time. Now I think the proper time has come, with space travel at last an accomplished fact, and the race already on to see who will be first to set foot upon Mars.

I can only wonder if that race will be quite so feverish after I have told my story.

I was in March of 1949, five years ago, when I ran into Mel Conway quite by chance in New York. This ordinarily would not have been surprising, but on this occasion it was, because I knew at that very moment he was supposed to be down a long the Orinoco somewhere. I knew it because he had told me himself that he expected to be there at least three months, and I had personally bidden him *bon voyage*. Also I hinted that I hoped he'd bring back another swell story for me to write up for the Sunday magazine supplement. Twice before he had done that, after he had discovered some ancient temple remnants of unknown origin. I wrote the stories sensationally for the Sunday supplements, while Mel presented his data to the more important scientific journals.

Therefore, meeting him so unexpectedly, it's no wonder I exclaimed, "Hey! Is it really you, or have you got a twin brother you never told me about?"

"It's me all right," Mel muttered. "I just got back sooner than I thought I would, that's all." And he tried to get away from me.

"Oh, no you don't," I said, grabbing him. My nose for news was sending me flashes. It was rarely wrong. "You found something down there, didn't you? Are you going back again? What is it, another temple?"

It took me two more hours, plus a bottle of A-1 Scotch, to learn he had found something all right and it wasn't another ancient temple. He wouldn't tell me what, except that it was important enough to bring him hurrying back here for Dr.

Anton DeHarries, preeminent in the field of archaeological research and a recognized authority on ancient and unknown languages.

So when they sailed for Para the following week I was along. It was a favor Mel granted me only when I promised not to release the story without his permission. He wouldn't tell DeHarries, either, what his find was; said he preferred to let us see for ourselves, without any advance opinions. De Harries, tall and athletic despite his advanced years, assumed an air of condescension which I'm sure was only a mask to hide his real curiosity.

At Para we picked up Pete Warren, Mel's partner, who had stayed there to purchase certain supplies we would need. These were already packed and waiting, and I could not see just then what was in the few wooden boxes, except one that was marked very plainly, "Explosives." Pete Warren was a rosy-faced, jovial gnome under an absurdly large white helmet, and he remained as mysterious as Mel had been.

We proceeded by river steamer up the four hundred tide-swept miles of the Amazon, finally reaching Manaos, where we hired a tiny power launch and a very unclean but husky native named Tumba.

From there our real trip began. Everything became, for me at least, an interminable hell of green and brown and blue. I think I shall hate those colors as long as I live. The hideous green of jungle extending unbrokenly on each side, the sluggish mud-brown of the rivers, and the glaring blue trip of sky overhead. For three days or more this river travel continued.

"Last time I came here," DeHarries reminisced, "was over ten years ago and it hasn't changed a bit. All of this might as well be out of the world. There's enough unexplored territory in here to occupy the white man for the next century."

We passed occasional mud villages where the natives came crowding down to the river edge to stare at us. We never knew whether they were hostile or not because we never stopped long enough to find out.

"I recognize them," DeHarries said wryly. "The only difference is that I didn't

have a power launch when I came in here."

But we eventually left even the last of the river villages far behind.

I was a little before noon, on the third or fourth day, when Mel cut across the current toward the jungled shore on the right. Then, as we came nearer, I saw it wasn't a shore at all, but another mud-brown stream that moved slowly, sluggishly, into ours.

We headed down it, and I groaned.

"Keep your shirt on; it won't be long now," Mel assured me.

Two hours later Pete Warren, who had been scanning the shore line, let out a whoop and pointed. I stared and saw a clearing in the jungle wall ahead. It looked no different to me than other clearings we had passed, but Mel said, "That's it," and cut the launch sharply in that direction.

It was past noon by the time we had unloaded the boat and pitched camp. We were pretty weary and cramped, but without a word Mel led us along a tangled trail into the jungle. Apparently he and Pete Warren had been along here before. A hundred yards further, this trail opened suddenly into another wide clearing, almost a perfect circle. And there in the exact center rested that which Mel had brought us here to see.

I say rested, but it was buried, or half buried. My first impression was that it was a meteor, and I was overwhelmingly disappointed. But then I saw that no meteor could have been so smooth and delicately curved. I knew then that this was a metal hull, and that I was staring at a spaceship.

I was still a little disappointed. Even at that time, five years ago, the first daring attempts at space travel were being made. Four or five rockets had already left Earth, never to be heard from again, with the exception of one that was known to have crashed in the Pacific. Looking at that half-buried ship in the twilight gloom of a jungle clearing, I think all of us must have had the same thought: that we had stumbled upon one of those pioneer rockets which had crashed here in this lonely spot.

It was DeHarries who convinced us otherwise. He strode forward purposefully, scatched at the verdigrised metal hull with his knife. The scratch was sharp and clean enough to show the metal to be of an unusual, dull greenish color. DeHarries didn't need to say a word as he turned to us; the bright glow of excitement in his eyes was enough. I knew Mel had done right in bringing DeHarries down here.

For the rest of that afternoon we worked in a dank heat, worked with shovels in the spongy ground around that alien ship, slowly uncovering it. It was a vaster undertaking than we had thought; we saw that it would take us at least another day to get anywhere. However, by late evening we had uncovered enough to see it was the stern we were working on, and that the ship was buried on a long slant. Indented in the hull we found some queer symbols, which might have been the name, proving indisputably that this was no Earth ship.

We returned along the path to our camp, tired but excited, certain that on the morrow we should uncover some sort of entrance.

Mel thought of something. "We may learn enough from the controls of this ship to aid us tremendously in our own space attempts!"

"You mean," DeHarries said dryly, "if there is anything left of any controls. Think of the impact necessary for a ship to bury itself that far in the earth. And we don't know how many years or hundreds of years it may have been there."

IN the cool of the next morning we set to work again, Tumba no less eagerly than the rest of us. In fact he did the work of two men, and this rather surprised me, for I thought natives had certain taboos and superstitions about such things as buried spaceships. At least it always seemed so in stories I had read. Tumba, however, appeared more fascinated than frightened by the situation. As though reading my mind he looked up at me, grinned, and continued to ply his shovel. Maybe he was thinking of buried treasure.

A few hours later we uncovered the first of the doors, or rather it was a circular

plate so close fitting that a line was scarcely discernible. There was no lock, no hand-hold of any kind, and it was apparent that we'd have to cut our way in. We went to work with the torches. That metal was the most peculiar stuff I ever encountered, tough and heat resistant to an amazing degree! I was slow work, and we suffered in the heat; but at last the plate fell outward, revealing a dark and malodorous interior.

We entered at last, flashing our lights around, and once again I was disappointed. There was simply nothing there. We played our beams on the interior of the rounded hull, and a smooth metal floor, and a doorway leading down into another compartment towards the prow. We moved cautiously across the slanting floor.

We reached the prow, and there, at least, was something. In a separate little room were the controls Mel had anticipated. But they were useless now, for they had been smashed beyond all recognition or repair. What puzzled us, however, was that this was no result of the spaceship's crash. The nose of the ship was singularly undamaged, which meant that this utter havoc to the controls had been done deliberately—and from the inside!

There was nothing we could learn or do here. We turned to go back. Mel was shaking his head disappointedly, puzzledly. Then DeHarries gave a little cry. He had pointed his light upward, above the control room doorway; and there, in a little alcove, rested something. I didn't see what it was until DeHarries reached up and took it down.

In his hands he held a sort of book, but it was like no book I had ever seen. It was huge, and seemed to be all of metal. Even the leaves we saw when DeHarries opened it were of some thin, durable metal foil. Queer angular symbols were stamped in shallow indentations for about the first twenty pages. The rest of the pages were smooth and blank.

DeHarries looked up at the alcove again and spoke calmly. "This book must have been placed there deliberately—after the ship crashed! Perhaps in the hope that someone, some day, would find and de-

cipher it. If there's only some key word or symbol to this language that I can work on—"

We hurried out into the sunlight again, where we examined the book more carefully. And there, on the very first page, was impressed an unmistakable diagram. It was the solar system. The sun and every planet were there, in tiny circles, correct as to size and position. Significantly, a curved dotted line connected the fourth circle to the third.

"They came from Mars!" Mel exclaimed unnecessarily. "But—good Lord, if they're not in the ship, what happened to them?"

We couldn't answer that—yet. We went back to work with the shovels, slowly uncovering the rest of the ship, but we worked a little less diligently now. DeHarries sat down in the shade with the metal book open on his knees, pencil and notebook in his hand. He was working harder than any of us. He filled page after page of his notebook with cryptic symbols, only to tear them out angrily, crumple and throw them away. Several times he rose and walked about the clearing.

At last—it must have been hours later—he apparently found the key. He wrote slowly and carefully for several hours more, transcribing those angular symbols into words and meaning. Back in the other clearing, at our camp, DeHarries didn't even take time out for the evening meal. Not until much later did he cease transcribing, from sheer weariness; but he would not yet read to us what he had written down, for there was a great deal more to come.

I, for one, did not get much sleep that night. I lay there in the dark and pondered over that strange manuscript from Mars. The thing, however, that most puzzled me was what had happened to the Martians after they landed on Earth! Of course, there was the question of how long ago all this had happened; but even if it had happened centuries ago, there should still be some trace of the ship's occupants.

I trusted that DeHarries would soon have the book completely deciphered, and that it would tell us the story, which had

every indication of having ended in some strange and terrible tragedy.

EARLY next morning we continued with our digging, and I must admit that subconsciously I was expecting to come upon some secret exit from the spaceship, perhaps an underground tunnel. I was disappointed, however. By early evening we had progressed sufficiently so that the entire length and contour of the strange ship lay exposed in a long, shallow pit. It would have taken much more than our combined efforts to hoist it out of there, but there was no need of that yet.

Only one thing happened. It did not mean much to us at that moment, but it was to have a direct bearing on the sudden, horrible outcome of our adventure.

I have said that Tumba, our native boy, was not superstitious. In fact he exhibited a curious fascination in our activities. Late in the afternoon we heard a peculiar, metallic grinding noise from inside the ship. Mel looked at me, startled; and then, seeing that Tumba had disappeared, we moved around to the entrance we had cut in the hull.

We found Tumba just climbing out. Upon Mel's questioning he explained that he was peering in, had slipped and fallen down the length of the slanting spaceship floor. Mel looked at him dubiously, entered and flashed his light around, but found nothing amiss. He then warned Tumba in no uncertain terms to stay out of the ship. Tumba was abjectly apologetic, but there was a certain guilty look about him, and in his eyes was a light I had never seen before. I thought at first that it was fright, but later I knew better.

Meanwhile DeHarries had progressed feverishly with his translation, and around the campfire this second night—the last night for us there, as it turned out—he said, “I have deciphered most of it now. I’ll read it to you, but you must understand there are certain words here that have no parallel in our language, so I’ve had to use a bit of guess work. But I think this is a fairly accurate and literal translation of the book.”

Eagerly we leaned forward to listen, as

there in the flickering firelight DeHarries began that strange story from Mars, the story that was to come to such a sudden and unexpected climax.

“It all seems so strange,” DeHarries began, “not because we are the first in the solar system to achieve space travel, as we probably are—but rather because of the sudden circumstances under which we were forced to leave V’Rai. We were not adequately prepared for space flight and would not have been for another year or two, Djhal tells me. Yet we now find ourselves, a party of six, here in the vast reaches of space with our tiny planet dropping gradually away behind us. I dare not look back at it too often, for it reminds me now of a bright drop of blood in the blackness, and a surge of horror floods my brain at the memory of what we left back there. Recording it here in the book is different; it seems more detached that way, it seems ages ago instead of two days.

“As the Princess Fai Elyn, last in the long line of beneficent rulers of V’Rai, I am not supposed to be afraid. And I am not so much afraid as I am apprehensive when I peer ahead at the tiny blue dot of Eraht. The color seems menacing. I suppose Djhal would call my reasoning silly. He says we should find on Eraht the same sort of beings as ourselves, though probably of a lower state of intelligence.

“Poor Djhal. He has had to work so hard, and there is so much yet to come—still he finds time to console me and be with me. It was Djhal who suggested I record the story of our escape from V’Rai, in order to pass the time, for it will be yet seven days or more before we reach Eraht and no one knows what will happen then.

“I am aware that Djhal is planning, even before we have reached Eraht. He only awaits the day when he may return to his own planet and exact his vengeance upon Atoh Kaamoj for the terrible thing he had caused. This may not be, however—I do not delude myself—for many years to come, and perhaps never.

“Atoh Kaamoj I do not remember well, except for one thing—the way he used to look at me. I cannot forget that, although

it was a number of years ago, when I was only fourteen. It was a coveting sort of look, half leer and half smile. He was an old man and he frightened me.

"I remember, too, hearing my father say—at first proudly but in later years sadly—what a brilliant scientific mind Atoh Kaamoj possessed, especially in the field of biology.

"But most of all I remember the day when Thuron, my father, became more furious than I have ever seen him; and Atoh Kaamoj left the palace, hurling terrible threats behind him, threats that did not then seem serious because he, too, was so angry.

"Not until a year or two later did father tell me what had happened: Atoh Kaamoj had asked for my hand in marriage.

"We did not see Atoh Kaamoj again nor did we know where he had gone. There came a few stories—from caravans returning from the red desert beyond the mountains—of a person fitting Atoh Kaamoj's description, who lived on the edge of the desert and fled to the mountain caves at the sight of others of his kind. Soon even these few stories ceased, and we supposed Atoh Kaamoj had died. No one could live long in that arid desert where only sparse bits of vegetation and fierce hordes of the Ghurii existed. . . ."

HERE DeHarries paused for a moment in his reading, looked up at us and said: "This word Ghurii, which is plural, occurs through the rest of the narrative. It's one of those words that has no parallel in our language. But as far as I can make out—and as you will see later—these Ghurii seem to be another form of life on Mars."

DeHarries cleared his throat, and went on abruptly with the narrative.

"A few years ago it would have been laughable if anyone had said the Ghurii, those tiny creatures scarcely a foot in length, were a threat to us. True, there were such hordes of them in the desert that they might have been a menace—were it not for the fact that they seemed unable or unwilling to come through the long, barren mountain passes. A few of them did

drift through from time to time, but only in sufficient numbers to be annoying.

"I remember, for example, the time some of them nearly ruined my garden. For a week or more I could not account for it, and I was moved to action only after my pet Kuoptis plants were completely denuded and dying. Then I made a diligent search and uncovered a nest of the horrid Ghurii creatures. Most people were accustomed to stamping on them or smashing them to death whenever they were encountered, but despite my anger I could not bring myself to do that. I remember going to father's laboratory and procuring deadly poison gas pellets, which I threw among them and shriveled the pests in a few seconds. I kept some of the poison handy, and had to use it only a few more times. Soon my garden, which they had seemed to love, was flourishing again.

"The Ghurii were peculiar creatures in more ways than one, and there was much written and debated about them. My father and Atoh Kaamoj, for example, were at variance on the subject, although the two of them were friends at the time. Atoh Kaamoj had studied the creatures at close range. He maintained that they had a definite though crude social order, and might some day, through natural evolution or otherwise, become the dominant race on the planet.

"Father scoffed at this. He admitted that our present race was slowly dying and would some day disappear, but that would not be for some thousands of years. He doubted that we would be replaced by the Ghurii, because they, too, were dying over there in the desert. If they had any sort of social order of intelligence, why had they not come through the mountains in some kind of concerted attack? But even if they did that, their very tininess would defeat them. With the sciences at our command a few of us could wipe them out methodically.

"Atoh Kaamoj would admit this grudgingly, then descend into deep thought; and father would laugh.

"He should not have laughed, for Atoh Kaamoj's theories were to come true very soon, and in a most terrible way. If only

we could have guessed what was brewing in the biologist's evil mind that day he stalked angrily out of the palace. If only we could have foreseen what was to happen in time to prepare adequately for it! But we were a happy and peaceful people; there had been no wars among us for hundreds of years, so we had not enough weapons to stem the tide when it came.

THE first inkling we had was when our radio picked up a few frantic and garbled messages from the more remote towns, saying that literally thousands of the Ghurii were pouring through the mountains into the valley! Our valley, of course, slashed across half the planet, and it was thought to be impregnable to the creatures, who until now had seemed unable to withstand the cold of the mountain passes.

"Before we could quite realize what was happening, even more terrible messages came—horribly fantastic accounts which we at first disbelieved. These were to the effect that the attacking Ghurii were enormous, in fact were many times their normal size! They were sweeping forward in concerted waves as if they had been drilled when and where to attack; as if they had been waiting a long time for just this supreme moment. Even as we in the capital city listened, hesitant and indecisive, many of these in-pouring messages ceased with suggestive suddenness.

"We did not remain indecisive long. Already Djhal and a few of his fellow-scientists had hurried to the laboratories in the huge building behind the palace. There, a year ago, the initial space experiments had been developed almost to their logical conclusions. There the test spaceship rested, which had not yet been tried out because of the terrible handicap in landing on a planet out of the emptiness of space. That problem alone remained to be solved before space travel became an actuality, and for a year Djhal had been working on it.

"Now he must have guessed that we were doomed. He must have realized that the only thing that might save us would be to take the supreme chance of a flight

into space. While the others erected a few available weapons in a barricade below the palace, Djhal swept the essential contents of the laboratory into the spaceship. I helped him, unquestioningly, by stocking the ship with what food supplies I could carry from the palace.

"We were but barely in time. Less than an hour later the first surging horde of the Ghurii was sighted.

"I have said that our weapons were few, and were erected hurriedly, but they were formidable. They consisted mainly of a dozen or so of the early type electro-cannon with a lethal range of several hundred yards, an a number of hand weapons of the same type. My father directed the strategical placements of the cannon, and ordered the gunners to await his command. Strangely, I was not afraid any more, and I remember that the thing that most impressed me in those moments was the sudden, ludicrous silence that descended over everything.

"The Ghurii tide swept nearer and nearer, and still father did not give the order to fire. They had to ascend a long gentle slope leading up to the palace, and they were necessarily slowed somewhat. The first of them came within fifty yards before father lowered his hand in the signal.

LIKE livid, living things the electrical beams leaped out in a crackling blue semicircle. The first result was horrible. Those Ghurii who were caught in the direct line of fire vanished in sudden puffs of flame. Others, more distant, sank to the ground, writhing and horribly burned, before they lay still. A few drifted through untouched, but our hand weapons quickly dispatched them. A sudden sickening stench arose, so that I had to lean on Dajhl, who was there at my side, and he hurried me away from the scene. A cheer arose from the entire populace who had gathered there behind the palace.

"Yes, for a while we had the fantastic notion that with a few electro-cannon we were going to stem the tide, wipe out the Ghurii, drive the remnants of them back into the desert. How futile a thought! We

had far underestimated their numbers and their fierce tenacity. A second and yet a third time they came surging up to the palace. Each time they were repulsed they left a charred havoc of their own dead over which the others came. Our electric charges were becoming weaker, and we knew we could not withstand any more assaults. Then I remembered the poison gas I had previously used upon them with such effectiveness.

"I whispered it to Djhal. He hurried back to the laboratory, dragging me with him and calling to several of his assistants. There we found the necessary chemicals for the gas, and we worked furiously for the next hour mixing them into crude bombs—but there were disappointingly few of them. Meanwhile the battle continued outside. We could hear the soft hissing of the electro-cannon, and vague cries from our people which did not sound quite like cheers now.

"My father appeared suddenly in the doorway. I moved quickly to him, but he would not allow me to look out. We did not need his words to tell us what had happened. In the last charge the Ghurii had gained the palace. Half the city's massed populace had been wiped out, mostly in hand to hand fighting with the tenacious creatures. Father seemed to have aged years in the past few hours, and I realized then what he realized—that this was the ultimate struggle for domination of the planet. The fury of this scene was being duplicated in other cities of our little kingdom, if the Ghurii had not already overwhelmed them.

"This is Atoh Kaamoj's work," father gasped. The awful size of these creatures can mean nothing else. I remember his theories, his hints as to certain glands that might . . . They'll be attacking in another minute, and we cannot—"

"Father was near despair and exhaustion, but the sight of the gas bombs we had prepared gave him new hope. He knew, too, that Djhal had prepared the spaceship for a quick flight if that were necessary. Now he approached Djhal and spoke to him as a son. 'You have done well, Djhal, and now I command you to

test your work. Go to Eraht as planned, and there—'

"Over Djhal's protests he spoke hurriedly, urgently, for there was little time. 'It is best! You must go now, at once! Is it not enough that I send with you my daughter, whom I know you love? If necessary, our race shall continue on Eraht! But I know you will find the means to return, Djhal, and when you do, you will find that we have conquered here!'

"But his tone was false, and even as Djhal and I tumbled into the ship, with four of his selected men as a crew, my father committed the final gesture which conveyed to us his realization of the ultimate defeat here on V5Rai. He dragged to us, through the laboratory door, one of the dead Ghurii creatures. I shrank from it with a gesture of loathing, but father thrust it into the ship after us, with the words:

"You must take it with you as a warning, either to yourselves or to the people of Eraht! A warning never to let the terrible thing happen there that has happened here! I shall remain here with my people to the end."

"Those were his final words. Then our door closed upon him, and our spaceship moved slowly out of the building upon its smooth launching platform. A few more seconds in which Djhal made the necessary calculations—and then we blasted up and away in a long tangent into space. . . .

"THAT was seven days ago. Eraht is very near now. Its very nearness and its strange blue color seem more menacing to me than ever before. I have not been able to get over the feeling that we should never have left V'Rai, that we should have stayed there and died with my father and the others. But perhaps they did not die! The deadly gas they had would be a formidable weapon indeed, and the Ghurii, as I remember, were peculiarly susceptible to it. So perhaps—

"I shall not think about it any longer. That is the horrible part, just thinking about it, and wondering, and never knowing—

"There are more immediate and drastic

things to think of now. Our landing, for example. I know that Djhal has become more and more worried. Over three-quarters of our fuel was used in the take-off, and the forward braking tubes are quite empty. In the past few days Djhal and the others have been working desperately to transfer the remaining fuel into the forward tubes. I think they are succeeding, but it is pitifully little.

"Djhal has just told me that we may have to make a crash landing. That is bad, as Eraht's gravity is more than that of V'Rai. Djhal says he may have to use all of our braking power to slow us down when entering the atmosphere, but after that he will try to negotiate at least one complete circuit of the planet and bring us down as easy as he can. The specially built crash room at the end of the ship may help to save our lives.

"Eraht is looming up terrifyingly large now, and Djhal says we may be entering the atmosphere at any minute. He insists that I, and the four others, stay in the crash room until the landing is over. He alone will be at the controls. He has wrapped and padded himself as much as possible, for his own safety. I must cease now. Recording this little history has been a great comfort to me, and has kept me from thinking too much of what may have happened back on V'Rai. But now—who knows if I will ever record another word here?

"**W**E have landed upon Eraht. As we entered the atmosphere I felt an unbearable heat, which continued a few minutes during our circuit of the planet. Then came the sudden plunge downward—and oblivion.

"I struggled up through a thick darkness with the dull thought hammering at my brain that Djhal surely had been killed. I and the four others, Djhal's assistants, were safe. But if Djhal was dead, I no longer wished to live either.

"Then Djhal came to me. He was horribly bruised and shaken, but not seriously hurt. He told us what had happened. We had entered the atmosphere much too fast, despite his application of our full braking

power. He had managed the circuit of the planet, still at tremendous speed, and then had come the fatal plunge. He had only time to urge the ship a little forward, toward a vast green expanse which he thought was foliage, and which might serve to cushion our fall. He mentioned, too, that he had had a fleeting glimpse of at least one large city, which proved that an intelligent race inhabited Eraht.

"Just now, however, we are faced with an appalling problem. We are in almost total darkness, we cannot move the spaceship, and all efforts to open the door are to no avail. The vast green expanse toward which Djhal headed must have been jungle, and we plunged down through it and into a spongy sort of ground. At least that is what Djhal thinks, and there is no telling how far beneath Eraht's surface we may now be. It is horrible to contemplate being buried here alive, but we still have one hope. Djhal and the others are now scraping the tubes, gathering every precious caked grain of tynyte that may be left. It cannot be much, but it may be sufficient to blast us out of here if used in the forward tubes. . . .

"It was to no avail. The ship shuddered with the effort, but did not move an inch. We are buried here irrevocably. What an ironic ending! We are the first to have crossed space to another planet; we thought to bring our science and our culture to the people of Eraht, and now they may never know.

"Unless we can remain alive here until they find us! Djhal has thought of one final plan, which in a way is an escape, or at least a chance for life—suspended animation! He thinks that out of the chemicals we brought along, he can devise a gas that will place all of us under suspended animation indefinitely! That is one of the things he was working on just before we left V'Rai, and it was virtually completed. The thought is frightening; it may mean many years before we are found; but to us though we remain here for months or years it will seem but a second. I remember, too, father's urgency that our race continue, even though it be on far away Eraht. And this is our final chance!

"There are eight large lockers in the crash room at the extreme rear of the ship. They are airtight and will be ideal for the purpose. Djhal is ready now. He intends that each of us shall enter first, and he will see that we are safely encased. He will enter last. He has devised an automatic cut-off that will supply the correct amount of gas to his own locker—and no more. I almost said tomb, but I will not use that word nor even think of it! I trust Djhal, and I am no longer afraid, knowing that he will be here beside me.

"That horrible Ghurii thing, which we brought along as an example and a warning, will be left in here, too. Djhal has further devised that the instant the crash room door is opened he will be released first, so that he may converse with the men of Eraht—after which he will release us. He also thinks it would be wise to smash the controls of the ship, as he can easily duplicate them later, and he will leave this book that I have recorded in a prominent place, so that those who enter will be sure to find it.

"Greetings, men of Eraht! We hope you may come soon!"

THAT was the end of the translation. DeHarries closed his notebook with a smile, and looked across the dying fire at us.

We all sat there for a moment, stunned. Mel spoke first, and it was explosively. "Then they're still alive! Good Lord, they're waiting there in the spaceship for us to release them! But—but why didn't we find them? I thought we examined that ship from stem to stern!"

"It must be," DeHarries said, "a secret compartment, one we overlooked. We didn't examine the inside of that ship too carefully, you know."

Pete Warren arose and threw some fuel on the fire, so that it leaped and shattered the surrounding darkness. "You know," Pete said, "I've been wondering. How long've those Martians been here, anyway? They sure picked a God-forsaken part of the world to land in! But it must have been in fairly recent years, because the Djhal fella said he glimpsed a city of large

size. That must have been New York City."

I shook my head stubbornly. "How do you know? Maybe it was a city of ancient Atlantis he saw!"

De Harries nodded agreement. "That's right, we've no way of knowing how long ago this happened. Perhaps so long ago that even their suspended animation has failed, and we may find them as crumbling skeletons. At least we shan't know until tomorrow, when we look for that secret compartment."

But in that, DeHarries was wrong. We were to know much sooner.

We sat around the comforting fire discussing excitedly the history we had just heard—and especially that part transpiring on Mars. We knew before very many years we would, ourselves, achieve space travel, and our first goal would be Mars. What would we find there?

I arose to throw more wood on the fire.

And then, just as the fire leaped high, we heard the sound again; that grating, metallic noise we had heard that afternoon. It came from the direction of the other clearing, from the spaceship. Mel and I looked at each other, and we simultaneously realized that Tumba was not here. We had not missed him. We realized, too, what must have happened. Tumba, that afternoon, in prowling about the ship, must have come upon the secret compartment. He must have decided to return later and investigate. And now—

Mel said the single word, "Tumba!" and we went leaping across the clearing toward the path leading to the spaceship. We had hardly moved, however, when something brought us to a halt, and we stood frozen to the spot. It was a scream of terror such as I'd never heard or hope to hear again—and I knew it came from Tumba's throat.

Seconds later we saw him fleeing toward us down the path. A vague, towering shape came swiftly behind him. Tumba looked back, tried to scream once again, but it was only a gurgling sort of moan. Then a brilliant, pencil-thin beam of blue light stabbed toward him from behind. Tumba stumbled to his knees like a collapsed

scarecrow, and I shall never forget the awful look on his face as he ploughed forward and lay still. He was dead—but it was as much from terror as from the little blackened hole that had passed through him. . . .

It all happened so suddenly that we could only stand in stupefied silence. Then something emerged from the jungle path and stopped abruptly, facing us, at the very edge of our little clearing.

THE thing revealed to us in the leaping firelight was fully seven feet tall. It stood erect on one pair of limbs, and from the middle of its body two other pairs of limbs stretched out toward us. Its body was definitely ant-like, rounded and segmented. Its head was small. Two antennae arched inquisitively toward us, and the eyes were huge and bulbous, as though it were staring.

It was staring, all right. In the few seconds that we faced each other, alien as the creature was, I could see that it was every bit as startled as we were. But it moved first. It took a single step forward, and I saw a positive glow of hate in its bulbous eyes. From somewhat came a buzzing, grating sound of speech, amidst which I could distinguish a single puzzled word: "Ghurii!" With that word, the thing raised one claw-like limb in a lightning movement, and I noticed for the first time that it held something metallic.

But we are quicker. With me, at least, the action was purely reflex, as my automatic seemed to leap into my hand. Mel and I fired simultaneously, fired until our clips were empty; and behind us we heard the fusillade of shots as Pete Warren and DeHarries emptied their weapons. The alien creature didn't have a chance. It used its weapon once, but even as the thin beam of blue streaked harmlessly over our heads, it was sinking slowly to the ground.

DeHarries, I think, was the first to comprehend the situation and the terrible mistake we had made. He hurried back to the

spaceship, with the rest of us on his heels. There, in the light of our torches, we found what we expected. Tumba had discovered the tiny secret compartment and had opened it.

What lay beyond was simply the row of airtight metal cases, as described in the narrative. They were over seven feet high, and the nearest of them was open. Well we knew what had emerged from it! We made quite sure that the same sort of creatures reposed in the other five containers; then we dispatched them quickly and thoroughly, using the creatures own beam-pistol for the purpose. After that we placed enough explosive under the spaceship to quite annihilate it, thus writing a complete finis to the story.

If to some readers this seems unnecessarily thorough and drastic, I want to remind them that we were laboring under a shock of horror at the time. Even DeHarries' usual complacency was shaken. His mistake, of course, had been in taking the words of the narrative at their face value, and attributing purely human qualities to the Martians.

But even greater had been the mistake of the Martians themselves and of Djhal, mainly, in assuming that evolution had taken the same trend on both the planets. But perhaps Djhal was not far wrong at that. It all depends, of course, on whether the Ghurii did win the ultimate victory on Mars. For I have not yet told of the final discovery we made in that secret compartment.

It is the crowning, ironic touch. We found the single Ghurii they had brought along as a warning to the people of Earth. It was quite dead, but well preserved in one of the cases. An erect, four-limbed creature, hardly four feet tall; hairy, undeniably barbaric, but unmistakably *homo sapiens*. An ugly little creature which would, nevertheless, in the further course of evolution, become an intelligent human being.



Wreckers of the Star Patrol

By MALCOLM JAMESON

CHAPTER ONE

VENUS—WORLD OF SLAVERY!

"WHY should I hire you?" Bellowed Captain Fennery, bunching his shaggy eye-brows into a heavy scowl. "We want no namby-pamby sissies in the *Hyperion*!"

Bob Hartwell merely flushed and stood a little straighter. If his need had not been so great, his answer to that would have been a straight right to the jaw. Moreover, he had just told the man why he was there—of his having been in command of the neat packet, *Mary Sue*, of the Venus-Tellurian Line, and how that company had blown up and left him stranded on Venus.

But restrained himself. Distasteful as working for Stellar Transport was, it was preferable to remaining in Venusport, broke and on the beach. An epidemic of *paludal* fever was sweeping the planet, and the crimps who supplied the swamp plantations with cheap labor were taking a heavy nightly toll. He *must* get off Venus at any cost.

There was an unexpected diversion. The *Hyperion's* second mate, a cadaverous individual of sour and spiteful mien, chose the moment to pluck his skipper's sleeve. Then he leaned over and whispered slyly in his ear. The captain shrugged his shoulders, but the mate kept on talking, smiling crookedly as he did. Presently Fennery lifted his eyes and fixed them on the young man before him with some glint of growing interest.

"Umph, may be so," he grunted, pushing the mate away. "I'll think on the matter." Then, regarding Hartwell with a curiously disturbing air of hard appraisal, he said to him, "Come back tomorrow with

your duds and papers. I may be able to use you as a first after all."

"Thanks," said Hartwell briefly, and strode out of the ship.

The Stellar outfit had a bad reputation, but it was his only means of escaping the plague or slavery. He would gladly have shipped as quartermaster—or even an A.B.—to get to another planet. To go as first mate was something he had not had the optimism to hope for.

So he walked with a lighter heart away from the rusty and battered old tub that lay in her launching skids, and crossed the slaggy skyport to the portmaster's office where he had left his master's certificate and his dunnage.

"You're crazy—stark, raving crazy," snorted that official, a grizzled veteran of the spaceways whom Hartwell had known for a long time. "The Stellar is a gyp gang and always will be. You'd better chance the fever and the swamp crimps and wait for something safer. I never knew 'em to hire a decent man except to use him as a goat. You may come out of it with your life, but you can bet your last button that you won't come out of it with your reputation."

"I can take care of myself," said Bob Hartwell a little stiffly. He knew that every word his old friend had said was gospel, but then . . .

"Have you looked over that *Hyperion*?" stormed the portmaster. "She's hung together with paper clips, sealing wax and baling wire! The underwriters' inspector just certified her for the voyage to Mars, but I'm thinking he's the richer man today on that account—not that his employers know it."

"I've looked at her," said Hartwell, still defensive. "Sure, she's no yacht. But if she

stays together long enough for me to get to Mars, that's good enough for me."

"But the chow, man!" exploded the other. "It's condemned Patrol stores. Even the officers have to pick the veevils out. And speaking of officers, that Fennery and his mate Quorquel are a disgrace to the skylanes. Fennery is a bull-dozing old s-downer and Quorquel's a slimy, conniving trickster. The only officer on the tub worth a tinker's damn is the first—hey! Didn't you say *you* were going as first? They've got a first mate!"

"I dunno," replied Hartwell, uncertainly. "All he said was 'maybe'."

"Watch it, son," was the portmaster's last warning. Then he shut up and put his endorsement on Hartwell's papers. Fools came and fools went. If a man ignored good advice, there was nothing an old-timer could do.

WHEN Bob Hartwell reached the *Hyperion's* berth the next day, after a night of hectic dreams, he noted that her tubes were hot and that her cargo ports were shut and sealed. The ground crew were getting clear of the searing blasts to come, but before the entry port stood Captain Fennery and beside him the portmaster with a sheaf of papers.

"Glad to see you, Hartwell," said Captain Fennery with surprising cordiality. "We're being withheld clearance for the lack of a first mate. Our Mr. Owsley indiscretely got into a brawl with some natives in a tavern last night. The gendarmes picked him up this morning with a cut throat. Will you sign the articles quickly, please, so this gentleman will let us clear?"

The shocking news of the demise of his predecessor gave Hartwell pause, for it was confirmation of the gloomy predictions made the day before by the friendly portmaster. It matched the foreboding dreams that had kept him tossing throughout the not, dark night. The most ominous aspect of it was the Fennery himself—perhaps Quorquel—had foreknowledge of it. Or else what did, "Come back tomorrow—may need a first . . ." mean otherwise?

Had Owsley's death been arranged?

But Hartwell was reluctant to back out now. He had scoffed away good advice and disregarded his own better judgment. It was also not his habit to back out of commitments. So he lost but a moment in darkling consideration, then reached for the articles and signed.

A miserable specimen of the dock-rats that the Stellar Transport hired for crews was already carrying his belongings on board, and the klaxons for the take-off were screaming. He hurriedly shook the portmaster's hand, then ran into the entry port.

Once the ship was up and away, and the fleecy ball that was Venus began fading to a small bright disk astern, his misgivings began to leave him. Captain Fennery, though gruff and taciturn, made no attempt to ride him, and the odious Quorquel took out his quite obvious personal dislike in half-hidden, taunting sneers. The only other officer was the engineer—one Larsen—who kept surlily to himself, as if making the best of a dirty job that could not be evaded, wanting neither blame nor sympathy. As for the crew, Hartwell ignored them—they were the scum of the skyports of a score of planetoids. He did pick up the trick of accompanying his orders with a slug to the jaw or a pointed thrust of a booted foot; that was the way the sullen slaves of Stellar expected to be handled.

The tubes of the *Hyperion* were worn. At intervals one of the super-chargers would choke up and die, requiring cleaning out and repriming, but the old tub plodded on. He was amazed to see the ancient Mark I geodesic integrator still in use, but on trying it found its clumsy machinery workable and amazingly accurate. The uncouth sky-dog Fennery was a good astragator, too, he learned, as he checked the trajectory when shiny blue Tellus was abeam. They would reach Mars all right with their cheap freight load of Venusian teak and kegs of Attar of Loridol. And should they not, there was a well-equipped lifeboat with places for all the officers and men stowed in a blister-like compartment on the roof plate.

The *Hyperion* was not so hard to take.

At that, Bob Hartwell did not like the ship or anyone in her. He had already made up his mind to jump her as soon as cargo was discharged. Surely Fennery would not object, for in the dives of Ares City he could find scores of jobless mates more congenial to his ship's way of life. But object or not, his newest officer's mind was made up. Despite his frequent self-assurances to the contrary, he could not permanently down the presentiment that some thing sinister was in the brewing.

Hartwell's mind was made up—yes. But the plans of men do not always come to fruition; the Fates take a hand.

THIRTY hours before they were due to land on Mars, Captain Fennery came bursting into his room, glowing with pleasure. He had an ethergram in his hand. Hartwell was off watch, since it was he who would have to dock her, but he sat up to hear the news. It was good news for him as well as Fennery. Stellar Transport was dropping him from its service—there would be no trouble about it after all!

"It's this way," explained the captain, showing extraordinary excitement for a man so blunt and cynical. "The company has decided this ship is not worth refitting, so they are disposing of her. They have their eye on one now lying at Mars and mean to buy it if my report of her condition is satisfactory. I'm to have command of her, and I intend to take Quorquel and this crew with me as a unit. I'm sorry to have to leave you out, but the higher-ups have already promised the new first's job to one of their old hands. But never fear—I'll see that you have a berth in due time."

Hartwell could not blink. Had Stellar's vile reputation all this time been nothing but rumor? And Fennery's? Why, he couldn't have planned better himself!

The *Hyperion* was going to the junkpile, where she belonged—would probably be towed to one of the Scrappo asteroids where derelicts and other tough old hulks were dumped. And he was getting put out of the company with a commendation instead of the usual kick and curse. He grinned as he thought of the letter he was going to write that portmaster on Venus.

But the skipper hadn't finished with his news.

"I've got to keep you on the rolls for a week or so, though," Fennery was saying. "They want me to inspect that new ship, but I've got too much else to do. You know ships, so I'm sending you. She's lying at Moloch—that's about two hundred miles from Ares in the Western Desert. You'll have to go by camel train, as there is a strike on among the 'coptor pilots, but you can telegraph back what you think. By the time you get back I'll have disposed of this ship and cargo and have a berth waiting for you."

"Thanks," said Bob Hartwell, wondering if miracles would ever cease.

The captain's apparent personal interest and the line's generosity were so out of keeping with the standard practice of even the well-run lines, that he could not help a twinge of suspicion as to what it was all about. It was strange that the Stellar people would buy, sight unseen, an old ship on the say-so of a one-voyage mate. It was stranger than a thug like Fennery would lift a hand to help any man.

And what of Quorquel, always flitting about in the background with his contemptuous sneer and crooked smile?

But try as he might, Hartwell could not dope out how they could hook him. So, once on Mars, he made the hard overland journey to Moloch and went over the *Wanderer* carefully. She was sound and well found. He reported so, taking great care to include her minor defects. She was far from new, but she would be a vast improvement over the sluggish *Hyperion*. Thus, he reported her, and recommended her purchase. Then he took the windy, sandy trail back to Ares.

It was at the skyport that the utmost in miracles occurred. Once more he approached the *Hyperion* as she lay in a launching cradle, and again her tubes glowed and smoke curled idly from them. Again her cargo-ports were closed and sealed for a voyage, and gain Captain Fennery stood anxiously at her entry port alongside the local portmaster with clearance papers in his hand. Obviously she was waiting for some final matter to be cleared

up and then she would soar. Then he quickened his pace. All his belongings but the clothes he wore were aboard!

"Figured you'd arrive about now," drawled Fennery, sticking out the glad-hand that Hartwell heartily distrusted, "so everything's ready."

"What do you mean, ready?" Hartwell asked, puzzled. He had understood the *Hyperion* was to go to the junk pile.

"Loaded, provisioned, fueled, cargo and crew on board, certified and itching to go," answered Fennery. "She's been sold to the Trans-Asteroid Haulage Corporation. All she's waiting for is her skipper."

"So what?" demanded Hartwell. "I want want my clothes! He'll have to hold off until I get them out."

"Hey, don't you understand?" laughed Fennery, with a bluff slap on the back. "She's had an overhaul—she's staying in service—they wanted a skipper that knew her. I recommended you. *You're* the captain of the *Hyperion*!"

"I'm damned," said Bob Hartwell, softly.

CHAPTER TWO

PROMOTION TO—SABOTAGE!

HE was damned, but not in the way he meant. All the alarm bells in his nervous system began jangling warning as Fennery held out a paper for him to sign. It was a receipt for the *Hyperion*, in good repair, fully loaded and cleared for the void. Fennery insisted it was but a formality.

"Sure," said Hartwell shortly, and brushed by into the port. He wanted to have a look around before he signed anything. Things might be all right. Or—they might not.

He hurried first to the tube room. It had been repaired, as Fennery had said. Three of the main driving tubes had new liners and injectors. The brightwork had been shined and there was fresh paint on the bulkheads.

It was the same way in the control room, where fresh star charts took the place of the dog-eared old ones. Hartwell examined

the log, saw that there were two thousand tons of scandium pentaluminate in the holds and provisions and fuel had been brought aboard. The invoice for the cargo hung on a hook, as did the receipts for the provisions. Everything was regular.

"I even did this for you," said Fennery, who had followed him in and was watching his inspection with satisfaction. He held out a paper. "Here's your trajectory, worked out as of five-o'clock today. Callisto is your destination, and this course skips all the asteroids in between—providing you leave on the hour."

"Uh-huh," mumbled Hartwell, taking the figures. His head was swirling.

On the face of it everything was all right. His quick eye had checked it in many ways during his swift inspection. When he saw that scandium pentaluminate was the cargo, he had glanced automatically at the holds' pressure gauges. They stood at two atmospheres—adequate to keep the volatile compound from evaporating. That was added evidence that the pentaluminate was actually in the sealed holds, for no one would have built up such a pressure for ordinary cargo.

Yet seals could be faked and invoices forged. He wondered.

"What's the tearing hurry?" he demanded, facing Fennery suddenly.

"Bonus—bonus and penalties, that's all," said he. "The Callisto refinery wants this stuff now. If it's there by the fourteenth, swell. If it's there before the fourteenth, you get a bonus of so much a day. If it's late, there'll be hell to pay, because there is a penalty for every day lost over schedule. Trans-Asteroid had the chance and snapped it up. All they lacked was a captain familiar with the handling of the ship. That's you."

Hartwell was still regarding him dubiously. It lacked but a few minutes of five o'clock and he knew standard running times to Callisto well enough to know that if he didn't start then they'd never be there on time.

"Suit yourself," said Fennery, indifferently, half-turning, as if to go. "I thought I was doing you a favor—now you can go to hell. Trans-Asteroid isn't going

to be tickled at being let down like this, and it isn't going to keep mum about it. You can pack your bag and get out of here and hunt your own job. As for me, I'm through—through with this bucket and through with you!"

"Wait," called Hartwell, as the stocky captain strode toward the port, "I'll take it and—well, thanks."

Fennery grunted, shook hands limply and went out. In his pocket he had Hartwell's signed receipt for the ship and contents.

Hartwell stared at his retreating back in a daze. He couldn't be sure whether he had been befriended, or high-pressured into making a sucker of himself. All the lurid stories of Stellar's practices and Fennery's slipperiness again flashed before his mind. Yet he had no personal grievance against company or man.

Moreover, he had signed the papers.

He snapped out of it. If there was devilry afoot, he would have time to sniff it out before he entered the danger zone of the little planetoids. His new mates, all strangers, stood by, awaiting orders. They looked reasonably competent, and the crew was at least no worse than the hands Fennery had taken with him.

"Take the void!" yelled Hartwell, really glad to have a command under his feet again, even if it was only the lowly, painted-up *Hyperion*.

The port clanged shut, the rockets swelled and roared and then came the savage lurch as the ship began to climb. Hartwell clung to the acceleration resistor-strap and watched his gauges with a critical eye. She was going up very smartly, faster than he had thought she would. She handled as daintily as if she had been in ballast.

He frowned at that thought, but then remembered the three new tubes and accessories. Of course! She *would* feel light.

The moment they were clear of Mars, Hartwell hastened to check the course handed him by Fennery, for the responsibility for safe navigation was his, not the former captain's. He checked it both by integrator and by hand. It was a good trajectory. Any fears he might have had that

it was a trick to crash him against an asteroid vanished. Moreover, it was the shortest possible curve on which to reach Callisto, and would hit its destination smack on the nose two days before the deadline.

A more minute inspection of the ship itself uncovered nothing to give concern. As he suspected, the so-called repairs were largely superficial, but there was no evidence of sabotage or anywhere a time bomb could be planted and not be discovered. The better things looked, the more he was mystified. He would have actually felt relieved if the could have found some devilry that would explain Fennery's geniality.

However, he soon found other grounds for suspicion and worry—his officers and crew.

They were a disgruntled, grouching lot, all former employees of the Stellar Company, and they whispered much among themselves. He also observed that when he looked at one unexpectedly, he was quite likely to find the man regarding him with a sneer—a sneer that was always instantly erased. It was as if they regarded Hartwell as the fall-guy for some trick so obvious that no capable man would fall for it. He learned, too, that all had excellent and imperative reasons for wanting to get out of Mars—mostly concerning the police.

THEY were well past the asteroid belt when the first overt act of the crew came to his attention. In prowling about looking for trouble, Hartwell happened into the compartment where the lifeboat was stowed. To his astonishment he found his second mate and a working party of four men busily stocking it with extra water, air-flasks, and provisions. It was not a thing he had ordered.

"What's going on here?" he demanded.

"Seeing the boat's ready, that's all," answered the mate, sullenly.

"For what?" asked Hartwell, angrily, choosing for the moment to overlook the omission of the "sir." He had discovered days before that Fennery had either left

him no blaster or else the crew had concealed it before he came on board.

"For anything," answered the mate. "It's an old Stellar custom."

"Knock it off," said Hartwell, hotly. "You're working for Trans-Asteroid now."

The mate laughed. "Hear that?" he said to the men, who were standing by, grinning. "We're working for Trans-Asteroid! Well, well, what a difference!"

A crunching blow to the jaw sent him sprawling, and the first of the three men who leaped at Hartwell as promptly jarred up against the far bulkhead and promptly went to sleep. The others decided to leave things as they were.

"Pick 'em up and carry 'em down to their bunks," said Hartwell harshly, and went below.

There was no aftermath to that incident, but Hartwell was all on edge again.

He took down his almanacs and planetary tables and began checking the terminal spiral segment of his trajectory, with utmost attention to the time factor. Again everything seemed perfect—all but one item.

He discovered that their course would intersect the orbit of Hebe—the outermost of Jupiter's satellites—at exactly the moment when the little forty-mile lump of iron would arrive at the same spot.

He might have changed course then and there, but he refrained. A footnote regarding Hebe remarked that the planetoid was erratic in its motions due to the perturbations caused by its bigger sisters, and that the values given in the tables must be used with discretion. That bit of information made the advisability of changing course too soon a risky business, for he had no idea whether Hebe would be late, early, or on time at the rendezvous. And since she was so small, the change of course could be made long after she had been sighted.

Hebe came into plain view the very next day, and Hartwell began an intense study of her. After about four hours he came to the conclusion that she was slightly behind her schedule and that he would probably pass the point of collision before she arrived. He could have made certain of it by going ahead then on his main driving

tubes, but since he was far into his deceleration for the planetfall on Callisto, he wanted to avoid adding momentum if he could. It would be better to wait until they were closer. Then a touch of a steering jet would throw the ship one way or the other, as needed.

He slept for four hours, for after entering the Jovian System he would dare sleep no longer, cluttered up as it was with minor moons so insignificant as not to be charted. When he woke he saw that his predictions as to the position of Hebe were correct. Or almost, for she was on his port bow and very slowly drawing aft. He computed that the only collision danger was with her forward edge. A brief blast ahead, accompanied by a brief blast to port, would kick him ahead and to the right. The resulting delay would be insignificant.

"Blow main tubes—full speed forward!" he ordered.

They were cold and took longer than they should. But at length they sputtered into full blast and the ship began to gather more way. But the delay meant more of a turn to the right, so he yelled:

"Turn right—full power!"

"Aye," grumbled the mate at the control board. He pressed a stud. For a moment there was no response; then the shudder of the ship told that a wing tube had fired. Hartwell was watching the onrolling planetoid closely, waiting for the ship's inertia to be overcome and to see the image drop away as the ship's nose veered off to the right.

Hartwell sucked in his breath with a horrified gasp. The ship was beginning to swing all right, but the wrong way. Her bow was crawling slowly to port—Hebe was dead ahead!

The onrolling lump of iron would be at the intersection just when the *Hyperion* would. The ship was diving straight for her middle at full throttle!

"Right, I said, damn you!" shouted Hartwell.

"Right she is—right deflector jetting full," echoed the mate, half rising and staring at the visiscreen. Then he screamed and jabbed the general alarm, and before Hartwell could grab him, he ran out of

the room yelling, "Abandon ship—collision!"

Hartwell sprang to the board, for there was still ample time to reverse the error. But jab as he would at the control button, there was no response. The crew had fled their stations as one man.

He muttered a curse and ran after the last of the echoing footsteps. He could not possibly handle the ship alone, and since she was doomed, he did not mean to die with her. He wanted very earnestly to stay alive and find out why this thing had been done to him.

By the time he reached the lifeboat its tubes were glowing and the panel that closed the compartment was beginning to open to the outside. He just had time to squeeze in behind the last man and get into the boat. He thrust the intervening men aside, yanked the first mate from the controls, hurled him behind him. Then he seated himself and launched the boat with a grim face.

It shot clear, and that first lashing blast blew it ten miles before he managed to set it into a rough orbit of comparative safety. It was not until then that he had time to glance at the vessel he had just left. The *Hyperion* was in a screaming full-power dive—or what would have been a screaming one if Hebe had had air to shrill the scream. She struck, and on the instant disappeared as a puff of vivid green flame.

He despairingly circled the tiny planet once, passing over the spot where the ship had died.

All that was to be seen were acres of glittering metal fragments. Of the two thousand tons of pentaluminate there was not a trace. There could not have been, for the crystals would have flown to powder at the impact, and being under zero pressure, would have volatilized into nothingness in seconds.

CHAPTER THREE

COLD-WORLD CONQUEST

BOB HARTWELL languished for three bleak months in Ionopolis' jail. He was fettered with chains, such being the

barbarous custom of the harsh Ionians—descendants of Terrestrial adventurers and deportees of three centuries before.

A roving Ionian patrol vessel had witnessed the premature abandonment of the *Hyperion* and her crash. Within the hour they had picked up the boat, questioned its crew, and brought them all to Io. Hartwell could learn nothing more except that he was being held on the charge of barratry.

In due time the day of the trial came. It would be unfair to call the trial a farce, since the judges were upright men who conducted the proceedings with dignity. But Hartwell knew before it started that the cards were stacked against him. All parties to it were hostile to him, and he learned to his dismay that the one chance he might have had—cross-examination of the witnesses—had been lost. The members of the crew, pleading that they were under the necessity of making a living, had been allowed to leave depositions and depart. Their stories had agreed in every detail. By now they were scattered far and wide.

The further things proceeded, the more apparent was the deadly dilemma Hartwell found himself facing. For the prosecution was aimed not at him, but over him. A battle of giants was raging, in which he was but a miserable pawn. Counsel for the Interplanetary Underwriters tried vigorously to prove that the destruction of the *Hyperion* had been planned and ordered by Stellar—who, it developed, owned the dummy company which was the beneficiary of vast sums of insurance on the wreck.

Stellar, on the contrary, claimed they were lily white. Their error, if any, was in hiring a man who later proved to be incompetent.

Fennery and Quorquel, who had just brought a second load of scandium pentaluminate to Callisto in their *Wanderer*, testified to Hartwell's "passably good" performance on the trip from Venus, but added that they recommended him to replace them solely because the ship had to leave and they could find no better. They regretted it now, but that was the way it

was. That was it. Hartwell had the hard choice of being declared incompetent or a criminal. If the former, Stellar collected; if the latter, I.U. won.

Stellar won, for the I.U. man was unable to produce a scintilla of testimony showing collusion or unlawful intent. The statements left by the crew were unanimous that Hartwell got rattled when he saw Hebe loom up before him, gave conflicting orders, and then precipitately fled the ship.

In the end, Hartwell was allowed to tell his own story. The judges heard him out and, after a brief retirement, rendered the decision. They must have been impressed by his bearing, for they did not order his license cancelled. The ship was lost, they said, through "bad judgment in delaying too late to take appropriate action in the face of an emergency." That was all. The case was closed, and there could be no appeal. The damning sentence was endorsed on Hartwell's ticket in red ink. Then he was dismissed—a free man.

A free man! He walked down the marble stairs of the Tellurian Building in Ionopolis in a daze.

Free to do what—starve? Red ink on a ticket never got a man a job. He walked past the sumptuous office suites of the Tellurian Legation without noticing them, out into the dim-lit street of the city. He walked to the jail and retrieved the small amount of money that happened to be in his pockets when the crash occurred. It was all he had. After that he found a cheap lodging-house near the skyport and slept on a bed of sorts for the first time in many nights.

THE events of the next day confirmed this worst fears. It was the same story everywhere. *No vacancies . . . sorry, we don't hire strangers . . . men of our own waiting on the bench . . . will let you know.* Always a turndown, but never the real reason. It was not a command he had been asking for, or even a first's berth, but *anything*. He would have gone as a quarter-master or a tube man, and he knew the traffic about the Jovian planets was heavy.

Late in the afternoon, when Io turned away from great, glowing Jupiter and was

lit only by the pallid beams of the sun, he was told why he could not get a job on Io—or anywhere else, ever. It was a tough old skydog who told him—a man who ran an obscure hiring hall near the skyport.

"Now," he said, "'taint only because you did a hitch with Stellar. Er lost a ship. Both them things hev been done before 'thout ruinin' a man. It's the I.U.'s new policy. You might ez well git wise to yourself. You're done!"

"But once I'm back home, where people know me," protested Hartwell. "I can—"

"Nope," said the old man, "'twouldn't make not a mite of difference. I just told you I can't give you a job as a ground-crew hand. I doubt if you could even get aboard ship as a passenger, if they knew you. You're on I.U.'s secret new blacklist. They been stuck so often and so hard they're putting a new clause in all their policies. Clause 88. Says the insurance is null and void if the insured company employs a man that has ever caused the I.U. loss—in any capacity. Even if one of your old companies believed your story, you'd still be too expensive for 'em."

Hartwell stared back at the old skydog in blank astonishment, but he knew he had heard the truth. The companies that had refused him as a tubeman in the morning had hired other tubemen in the afternoon.

All he could do was mumble his thanks and crawl back home.

The next day a cop picked him up. Later in the day another, and another. They wanted to know what he did for a living. *All right. Get a job within three days, or else.* Io, it appeared, was as tough a place as Venus.

By the third day he had the job. He signed on with an agency to be an och-hand, the Ionian version of a cattle puncher. He would be taken to the Simpson ranch, shown how to ride a tame ochtosaur, then turned loose on the range to ride herd on the wild ones. At slaughtering time he would be expected to help with the rendering of the smelly dragon fat and the tanning of the tough hides. The pay was nominal, but grub and outfit were furnished. He took it in preference

to the chain gang. But it was not to be for long, for his soul burned now with but a single desire—to find Fennery and strangle the truth out of him, then go for the Stellar Transport Company.

It was for longer than he thought, for old man Simpson also ran a store and managed to keep all his employees in debt to him. But one day, as Hartwell was riding range, plodding along on the cumbersome, eight-footed, plated beast that looked like a drunk's delirious dream of a double-rhinoceros with batwings, he became aware of something uncanny happening overhead. He looked skyward and saw them coming, at first by ones and twos, then in scores. Strange little craft of the skies that had no business being there. And they were all trying frantically to get to Ionopolis, judging from the ruinous flare of their exhausts.

Some were small inter-satellite ships and ferries, but most were tiny skyport craft, such as tugs, yachts and tenders.

More amazing, there were planes—planes designed only for atmosphere-borne flight, yet bearing the characteristic markings of Callisto and Ganymede. He saw that they had boat rockets lashed to their struts and guessed it was by means of those that they had spanned the void between the Jovian planets.

One flew low enough for him to see the terror in the faces of its occupants. It was a panic! What were they fleeing from?

Presently a Callistan stratoliner got into difficulties. Its narrow wings, good enough for Callisto's heavier air, would not hold it up over Io. It staggered a moment, then fell fluttering groundward at a dangerous speed. It struck not a mile from where he sat on his steed, cradled in the natural saddle between the och's two wings and astride the dorsal hump. It flung its passengers right and left and immediately burst into flames.

Hartwell flicked on his electric goad and applied the heat to his clumsy mount's shoulder blade. The animal squalled, then flapped its bat-like wings and slowly got off the ground. In a few minutes Hartwell had dismounted and was bending over the

sole survivor of the smash. He was badly hurt and had little time to live.

"Urans," the dying man gasped, trying to point back to where they had come from. "The Urans are raiding . . . burning, slaying, looting. . . ."

That was all. The man's eyes glazed and he tried to roll over on his face. But it was enough. The Urans had not raided in two generations, but there was not a man, woman or child that did not know about them. They were a non-human race, living on dark Uranus—and they were irresistible.

They were quasi-anthropoid, resembling gorillas, except that they were covered with short feathers and had highly-developed brains. They had science enough to build spaceships and weapons superior to man's, but they were savages nevertheless. They never attempted to conquer or colonize. They only made forays. Two or three times a century they would descend on the outposts of Saturn or Jupiter, harrying and burning, carrying away heads, loot and women. Why they took the women alive no one could explain, though perhaps it was for sacrificial purposes. What men they encountered they invariably slew, and carried away their heads and skins as trophies.

Hartwell remounted with a bound. He jerked his steed about and forced it into ungainly flight. He cared little for the Simpsons, but they were human, and there was Adele, the schoolteacher at the ranch. She had been very kind to him on the few occasions he had been there. It was unthinkable that she fall captive to the fiends from the outer planet. He must get there quickly.

The och he rode flew with exasperating slowness, and when he topped the last rise, his heart sank. A stumpy black ship was just taking off, leaving behind it huge billows of smoke mushrooming up out of the Simpson house and the hide warehouse. But there was still another on the ground, a much smaller one of reddish color. That meant that a Uran chieftain had stayed behind for some bit of last-minute loot.

Then Hartwell saw what that "loot" was. Smoke began to curl from the eaves of

the schoolhouse, and out of it stepped the huge Uran, bearing lightly in his arms the form of an unconscious woman. Adele! That time the och jumped, for the hot goad was applied full force.

As the och fluttered panting to the ground inside the body-strewn compound, Bob Hartwell was off in one bound, jerking his blaster out as he leaped. He knew the weapon was useless against the monster's thick hide, but it might draw his attention. The Uran was on the threshold of his ship; in a moment he would be gone.

HARTWELL took careful aim and fired. The ray struck the creature squarely in the back, searing away a patch of feathers.

The Uran vented a howl of rage and threw his burden down, then whirled and glared about to see where the attack had come from. He spotted Hartwell and charged, roaring, flailing his great arms. There were weird and lethal weapons hanging to the belt he wore about his middle, but Hartwell did not expect him to use them. The Urans gloried in their fierce strength, and preferred to clasp their victims to them and with one twist of their gigantic hands wring the head from the body. So Hartwell awaited the onslaught, armed only with a cast-off och-shoe he picked up from the ground beside him. He had tossed the useless blaster away, since no man-devised ray could pierce the Uran hide.

The och-shoe was an iron affair, shaped much like a giant thumb-tack, only the pointed part was a spiral screw which worked up into the animal's horny leg. The shoe proper was a disc of iron, roughly a foot in diameter. Hartwell held it loosely behind his back until the charging foe was almost upon him. The Uran leaped, grimacing and screaming, with outstretched arms to grasp his prey.

In that brief instant, while the monster was in mid-air, Hartwell flicked the shoe to the front and planted it squarely on his own middle, set his stomach muscles, and tensed for the creature's bone-cracking grip. He ducked just as the heavy, feathered chest hit his, and felt the wind

knocked out of him as he went over backward with the steel bands of arms encircling him and squeezing. For a moment things went black, and then the Uran ululated horribly and Hartwell felt the icy orange body juice of the monster oozing out upon him. He had tricked the creature into doing something he had not the strength himself to do—puncture his softest part with a shaft of twisted steel. It had been a desperate gamble—but it won!

As they rolled apart, Hartwell snatched a weapon from the Uran's belt. The chieftain staggered to his feet, clutching at his torn belly and screaming. By then Hartwell had found out how to operate the gun in his hand, and let drive with it. There was a hissing sound, a sharp kick, and the Uran's upper half silently disappeared. Hartwell left the still kicking legs on the ground behind him and darted toward the grounded ship.

Another Uran poked his snout out only to receive the fire from his dead chieftain's gun. Hartwell blasted two more before he reached the prostrate form of Adele, but though he sprang past her and on into the ship, he saw no more. He stood for a moment in the entry port, alert for a rush. None came. He took a hasty look at the interior of the craft.

Uran science had developed on peculiar lines. Hartwell understood nothing he saw, except the nauseous bin filled with human hides and heads lately torn from their owners. He saw also the piles of booty, and selected from one of them a double handful of Saturn stones, each worth a fortune. In the emergency that lay ahead it would be well to have at hand some instantly negotiable assets. Then he opened the spigot of what seemed to be a drum of lubricant and let its contents flow out. He set the gummy liquid on fire, then ran out, caught up the unconscious Adele, and staggered through the smoke to where his och was waiting. Now to get to Ionopolis—it could be done.

IT took them four days to reach the city. The clumsy och, despite all goading, stubbornly refused to fly carrying double,

so the journey was at a plodding walk.

For the first two days of the trek, the sky was full of refugee ships hurrying to what they hoped was safety. Only a few Uran ships were to be seen, only the vanguard of the horde that was sure to come as soon as they had done their vileness elsewhere. Io, it appeared, was the last place on their list.

The gates of Ionopolis were closed, and hard-faced Ionian guards turned back all but native Ionians. A clamorous mob of Tellurians, Venusians, and Martians were begging for admission within the walls, but the guards were obdurate. The city was jammed already. Io could look out only for her own.

Hartwell shouldered his way through the crowd, dragging Adele behind him. At last he got to the brutish officer in charge and whispered something to him. At first he got an angry shake of the head, but there was a flash from hand to hand, and the guard officer became more civil. The exchange of the Saturn stone had been so quickly and discreetly done that none standing by saw it. But there was a wild clamor of indignation raised by those left behind when they saw the guard summon a subordinate and have the lately arrived pair ushered through a small postern gate.

"Safety—for awhile, at least," breathed Hartwell, as they emerged inside.

Adele shuddered. She could not forget the horrible scene at the ranch.

They walked on, noticing that the city was crowded. Almost every house was shuttered up, and most had signs on them saying there was no lodging or food to be had inside. Then Hartwell spied a soldier tacking up a bulletin, and saw the crowd surge up behind him to read what the latest bad news was. He left Adele at the fringe and bucked his way in until he could see for himself. As he read it, the lines on his face tightened grimly. They had fallen out of the frying pan into the fire!

It was a proclamation by the viceroy. Owing to the impending siege, the overcrowded condition of the city, and the shortage of food, it was imperative, the order said, for the city to rid itself at once

of all non-citizens. Those foreigners who could manage to find room on board ships bound for the Inner Planets were advised to leave, but no one could be allowed into the skyport without an exit visa. All other foreigners found in the city after noon tomorrow would be given their choice of the lethal chamber or being thrust outside to take their chances with the Urans. It was a harsh measure, concluded His Excellency, but necessary. He had, however, arranged for a few "mercy ships."

Hartwell backed away. Again he seized Adele by the hand, and hastened forward. The streets were packed and the going hard, but they made some progress. They had to detour four blocks to get by the Martian Embassy, for the frantic Martians were equally affected by the order, and all the ten thousand of them were trying to get passports at once. It was a foretaste of what to expect at their own legation.

There, an even larger crowd were frantically besieging the guards to let them in, and among them many aristocrats in their purple tunics, and bankers with their white and gold robes. Immense sums of money were being openly offered as bribes.

It looked like a hard nut to crack, but Hartwell cracked it. He found a back door—the one he had been taken through as a prisoner—where the crowd was small and relatively poor, and after a good deal of hushed dickering was admitted. The cost was four of the precious Saturn stones.

Two hours later he and Adele were ushered into the office of the Third Secretary. That exquisite gentleman looked Hartwell over insolently and favored Adele with a similar disdainful look. Hartwell returned the look with interest. It had been this very secretary who had committed him on the day of his arrival.

"How did you get in, you scum?" asked the secretary, in a silky voice.

"I walked in," said Hartwell, restraining himself. It was no time to display temperament. "We want visas to Tellus. Here are our passports."

The secretary did not so much as glance at them. He lay back dreamily in his chair.

"My dear fellow, don't you know there are only three ships going out tomorrow

and that they are already booked to two hundred per cent capacity? There may be a third, but there are many ahead of you. Fine people, powerful people, wealthy people. . . ."

Hartwell suppressed his craving to commit murder and drew out his remaining store of Saturn stones. There were six left. He selected a good one and held it out. The rest had to be saved for the greedy "mercy ship" people. The secretary displayed his interest by the gleam in his eyes, but, "You do not understand, my friend," he said weakly. "Visas are not to be purchased." He paused and scratched his head thoughtfully. "However, I might use my influence for, shall we say five more?"

The secretary never knew what hit him. He slithered down into his well-cushioned chair until his weight rested on the nape of his neck. And there he slept gently while the grim-faced ex-astragator rummaged his desk until he found his stamps and seals.

A moment later the passports were in order.

"Come," he said to the wide-eyed Adele, "let's go."

But he paused a moment to select the least valuable of the stones—a pale amber one of low grade, yet worth ten years' salary to its recipient. He stooped and placed it in the sleeper's hands and gently folded the fingers to encompass it.

"Appeasement," whispered Hartwell to Adele, as they tiptoed out the back door of the room. Four hours later they were on the skyfield, camped with the other lucky ones about the fires lit near the cradles. There was one more hurdle to be jumped, but that would have to wait until the ships came in.

CHAPTER FOUR

FUGITIVE FROM THE SLAVE-WORLD

WHEN dawn came the Ionian soldiers routed out the half-frozen sleepers and herded them to one side of the field. The three "mercy ships" were about to land. They were three good-sized liners sent

from Mars at the urgent request of the Jovian viceroy. It took them about an hour to get settled and the slag to cool enough for the people to approach. Then the grand rush began. The first ship open was immediately engulfed by a throng of frenzied refugees, each fighting to be the first in.

Two thousand of them must have been taken in when its great port clanged shut. The same thing occurred at the second, but by the time the third's turn for loading came, the soldiers had established some semblance of order. The crowd had thinned to manageable proportions, though it was evident that the remaining ship could not possibly hold more than half of them. With clubs and drawn blasters, the soldiers forced the frightened crowd to form orderly lines. Then the final loading began.

Hartwell and Adele were within a hundred places of the head of the line when the last refugee disappeared within the ship. Hartwell entertained the thought of trying to strong-arm his way forward, but a glance about at the determined military told him that that was out. It looked very much as if he were beaten again. The same thought must have occurred to many others, for the crowd began to melt and drift back toward the city. The idea of many was to secure breakfast, if food was to be had.

"Stick around," said Hartwell to Adele, as she, too, suggested they had better think of something else. "That skunk said *at least three ships*. There may be others." He lied when he said it, for what the secretary had said was that there would be *only three ships* and that they were booked to double capacity. But he hoped against hope that there might be another. If so, they would be on the ground. At any rate, only death lay behind them.

All the eager crowd had gone but a scant four or five hundred when the flare of breaking rockets was seen overhead. There was a scampering to get clear of the incoming ship, then a brief anxious wait, and the surge forward.

"But it's blistering my feet," wailed Adele, as they hurried across the still smoking ground.

"Damn the feet!" muttered Hartwell, picking her up and carrying her. "I can do without feet, but not without a head."

They were among the first to approach the newcomer, and already the soldiers had taken charge and formed a line. This time there were only a few dozen ahead, and Hartwell knew they would get in. He saw the name of the vessel painted in fresh white letters over the entry port. It was the *White Swan* of Juno. It was not a liner, but an old scow of a freighter, very similar in its lines to the *Wanderer* he had inspected at Moloch on Mars. As the line crawled closer, he could see a man sitting at a desk beside the port, another standing beside him with a drawn blaster, and still another armed man at the port itself.

At last Hartwell and Adele reached third place. By then he had taken in the situation. The man at the desk was Fennery, with a box before him and a large basket on the ground beside him. The box was half filled with gems and uranium briquettes, the basket with Tellurian gold-backed radium certificates. The man on guard over him was Larsen, the quartermaster; the man at the port was Quorquel. The ship was the *Wanderer*, as closer scrutiny of the false name showed. Underneath the paint the embossed permanent name could still be read by an inquisitive eye.

Another dilemma. Behind lay the choice of lethal chamber or sacrifice to the Urans. Ahead lay certain treachery, though the nature of it was unpredictable. But ahead also were the very men Hartwell wanted to come to grips with, and this time he was forewarned. He could not hope to cope with the forces behind him, but he might attempt once more to match wits with these crooks. He resolved to take the chance, though he realized he was involving the innocent Adele in his gamble.

"This is hay!" he heard Fennery bellow out contemptuously to a sputtering, indignant banker, who had offered a bale of countless Jovian talents. "First-water jewels, or good Tellurian cash . . . no junk goes."

"B-b-but . . ." stammered the banker, despair in the face.

"G'wan," ordered Larsen, twirling his blaster. The Ionian soldier at the head of the line pushed the banker roughly out on to the field. It took real money to get aboard the merciful *White Swan*.

The next man up had good collateral. A pint of good Martian super-diamonds and a couple hundred thousand sols of Earth-guaranteed currency. Fennery took it all, then demanded more.

"That's all I've got," protested the man. "It's a fortune."

"Okay," said Fennery, indifferently, "but you'll be searched at the entry. What they find on you'll be extra fare for lying."

Hartwell knew that was so, for he had noticed Quorquel frisking each one as he went in, and there was another box and basket by his side. So when he confronted Fennery, he held all five of his remaining Saturn stones in his hand.

"Don't waste my time, you bum," snorted Fennery, recognizing him. He made a gesture to the soldier.

"Wait," said Hartwell, and displayed the stones. "For two, me and the young lady." He shoved Adele past him and in front.

"Not enough," grunted Fennery.

"It's twice as much per head as the guy ahead just gave you." Hartwell shot a knowing look at the Ionian soldier and delivered a friendly wink. The soldier grinned. That was enough for Hartwell. He tossed the five stones into Fennery's box and started to walk on in.

"Hey," shouted Fennery, "it's not enough, I said." But his bluster began to fade as the Ionian soldier moved forward with a threatening look. Even an Ionian can stand just so much. "But," Fennery finished lamely, "I happen to be short a mate. The stones go for her; you can work your way. Okay?"

"Okay," said Hartwell. Fennery had saved face, but at the cost of his insurance, if that was the racket this time. Also it would enable Hartwell to have access to the operating parts of the ship, a privilege which would be denied him as a paying passenger.

Hartwell underwent the loathsome Quor-

quel's search without batting an eye. Then he took Adele by the arm and stepped into the dark lock of the old *Wanderer*. Anything connected with Fennery and Quorquel was smelly; but why had they changed the old tub's name? Something most definitely stank.

"Watch your step every instant from now on," he whispered to Adele, as he led her into the musty interior. "This ship's dynamite and the personnel's poison."

MARS was the supposed destination, but the course Fennery set led far afield from the usual one. He explained it by saying the normal course was badly cluttered with some of the tiniest of the cosmic gravel, which was very hard to predict and avoid. They would straighten up after they had pierced the Belt.

Conditions on board could only be described as awful. There was food enough, thanks to the forehold being crammed with Callistan *frapjiman*, a sort of copra made from cactus plants. It had a vile taste and odor, but was rich in food value and vitamins. But the air was bad, and from the outset the water was rationed in dribbles. Knowing Stellar's parsimonious policy in general, and that this trip was an impromptu one, Hartwell had serious doubts that many of those on board would reach the destination alive, whatever it was.

It was the living quarters that were the worst. In order to accommodate as many refugees as possible, Fennery had evidently jettisoned part of his cargo in space so that he could use the afterhold for a barracks. Hartwell recognized the odor the moment he stepped into the place. It was ochtosaur oil, which not only has a nauseous odor, but is gummy and sticky, and the drums it is transported in invariably leak. In that hold, which was always insufferably hot, due to its proximity to the driving tubes, standee bunks four tiers high had been erected. The narrow aisles that ran between could not hold all the passengers at once, so that they were compelled to lie abed. The place was almost a second Black Hole of Calcutta.

Hartwell had been given the second mate's room, which he promptly turned

over to Adele and three other women. The room was designed for one occupant, but crowded as it was, it was palatial as compared with the after hold. He himself slept, when off duty, in the deck of the passage just outside the control room. He was put to work immediately, standing control watches with Larsen as helper, while Fennery and Quorquel took the other trick.

He took pains to make friends with Larsen, for he judged the fellow to have a decent streak for all his sullen obedience to every order given him.

"There's dirty work going on here," observed Hartwell, the second night out. "It's going to be tough on that pack of suckers back aft."

Larsen grinned sourly.

"There's always dirty work afoot on a Stellar ship," he said sourly. Then added with disgust, "But this is *too* dirty. I'm sick of it already."

"What's the payoff?"

"I—don't—know," said Larsen, dragging the words out worriedly. "We were three days out of Callisto with barely enough fuel to reach Mars, short of water, and short of air, what with keeping those holds up to pressure on the trip out. Then Fennery gets the S.O.S., sees dough in it, dumps the och oil over the side, and high-tails it back to Io. We couldn't get to Mars if we wanted to."

"Why did they change the name of the ship?"

"I don't know that, either."

Hartwell puckered his brow. He was going to have to do some detective work and do it fast. He did not mean to be too late, like last time.

"You going to string along?" he asked.

"Guess so. I'll have to. It's a dog's life, but they always take care of you. If you play with 'em, they cover you. If you don't—well, it's just too bad."

"I found that out."

"Yeah. There wasn't any pentaluminate on that ship you crashed. Stellar bought it, all right, and paid for it. But you went out empty. Then he loaded it and came on after. Good clean-up that—my share was a grand."

"How do they split?"

"Stellar takes half; Fennery splits a third with Quorquel; we get the rest. That crew that double-crossed you got a grand a-piece, too. Fennery figured you to be a good captain and that you would do just what you did. He knows Hebe like a sister, and just where she would be. It was as easy as that."

Hartwell laughed mirthlessly. Yes, it was as easy as that!

WHEN he went off watch, Hartwell turned in after a bite to eat and pretended to be asleep. But not for long. He had previously abstracted the key to the lifeboat compartment long enough to make a copy. With that in his hand, he stole up a ladder, crossed the ship, and climbed another ladder. He unlocked the door, flicked on the light, and went in.

He was prepared for a well-stocked lifeboat—wasn't it an old Stellar custom?—but nothing like what he found. The seats for the fourteen crew members had been torn out and stacked at one side. Where they had been there was instead an assembly of packing cases and gas containers. Food, food, and more food. Spare space suits. Bottles of air at high pressures. Plenty of extra fuel. A field radio set. And seats left for only two men!

He searched further. He found a fat envelope, sealed. He weighed it in his hand, then remembered that there were plenty of such envelopes he could get at to replace it with. He tore it open and squinted at the contents. There were the insurance policies—the ship's copy of them. But more amazing, there was the *Wanderer's* original log worked out for five days to come! He had no time to examine it, but thrust it back into the envelope and laid it away. He hunted for the jewels and money, but those evidently had not been brought up yet. Nor the blasters or ammunition. But among the tanks and boxes were the sky chests of both Fennery and Quorquel. It was to be a two-man take-off, and devil take those left behind!

For one brief moment a great and almost overpowering temptation came to him. The ship was doomed—it had inadequate air and fuel, and the water was perilously

low. Those in it were either wastrels or scoundrels for the most part. Why shouldn't he slip down and quietly call Adele, and the two of them escape now while the chance was at hand?

But another thought pushed the evil one out of his head. It was not the way he wanted to deal with Fennery, nor would it exonerate him. It was easy to run, but he preferred to stay and fight. So he stopped and stood in thought for a moment. Then he resolved on his course of action. The first steps were clear, the end clouded with doubt; but it did not involve running away.

He lost no time in getting back down below. He found Larsen and shook him awake. He told him hastily—while between them they made up a dummy package to replace the stolen log and policies—roughly what was afoot.

"They take care of you, huh," he finished. "Come, I want to show you something."

Larsen gritted his teeth when he saw, then cursed his captain and first mate fluently and at length.

"They're wary as foxes, damn 'em," he said finally, "and they've got the blasters. What can we do?"

"Plenty," said Hartwell, grimly. He had had a peep at the log he'd found and he knew he had a few days. He also was not unfamiliar with the Belt. "Gimme a hand." That was the beginning. While Fennery and Quorquel stood their own watch together, Hartwell and Larsen were working like beavers, shuttling up and down ladders. The provision cases were broached, one by one, emptied and resealed. Their contents were stacked in Hartwell's room, much to the discomfort of the four women living there. But they were told to help themselves. Fennery's choice chow beat *frajiman* forty ways.

The same with water. The two stealthy rectifiers of wrong brought down all the full breakers and replaced them with others that were also full—but not of water. Ditto the air flasks. They bled several into the polluted air of the ship at large, and took them back empty. The others they switched for the ones emptied

on the voyage out. They also stole most of the boat's fuel and hid it in appropriate places. The radio they did not dare remove, for there was no replacement for it, and the theft would be noticed. They contented themselves with disabling it.

"They won't enjoy their cruise, I'm thinking," remarked Larsen gleefully. He was doing something he had yearned to do for years.

"You ain't seen nothin' yet," said Hartwell, and produced a small welder. He put the deflector fins of the boat hard over and welded them that way. Then he took a wrench and cast loose the control lever, set it as if midships, and tightened it up.

That was the end of the fourth night's work. Hartwell checked over his elaborate piece of sabotage and found it good. There was one item left undone—to recover the money and jewels. It might be done, or might not.

It was the twentieth hour of the next day that Hartwell and Larsen relieved their superiors for what they knew was to be the final watch. They took over the controls as stolidly as if they had really been the dupes Fennery thought them to be. But the echoes of the steps down the corridor had hardly faded away when Hartwell jumped up.

"Remember," he warned, "if they come back and ask for me, tell 'em I got sick and had to go to the head."

Then Hartwell was off. Fennery had gone, he knew, to his room where the stuff was in the safe. Where Quorquel had gone, he could not guess. But he hurried up to the boat compartment, went in and locked the door behind him, and hid on the far side of the boat.

Presently he heard the grating of a key in the lock. Then Fennery came in. Hartwell crouched and listened. He heard the gems clink in their carrying bags as Fennery carefully stowed them underneath the seat that was to be his. After doing that, he went out.

"The money, of course," thought Hartwell, realizing that there was so much of the booty that it could not all be carried on one trip. Well, let the money go—a dozen of the best stones were worth all

of it. And, he thought with sardonic satisfaction, possessing a few millions in money would add a little fillip to their discomfort while starving in the void. Moreover, he did not want to be in the boat compartment when the boat's blast was fired. He scrambled up the jewel bags and hurried out.

He had to squeeze into the shadow of a stanchion as he heard both men coming. Both were wheezing and heavy laden, and so intent on placing their feet that they did not see him. Hartwell let them pass, then scurried on below. He had just reached the control deck when he heard the dull boom of the boat's kickoff and felt the faint tremor that shook the ship. They were on their way!

And at that moment, also, the *Wanderer's* own tubes sputtered, misfired, and died out. In that last ten minutes, Quorquel had been attending to a small job of sabotage of his own. Well, he was fiendishly thorough, so there was no use in hurrying about it. A minute or so would make no difference.

Hartwell dropped the jewel bags into the hands of the expectant girls.

"Stick 'em under the mattress," he directed, "and one of you be lying on it all the time. Hope it don't put kinks in your backs." And with that he was gone.

He hurriedly gave Larsen the high spots. There was no point in keeping up the watch now. If the ship was going to hit something, she would hit it, and that was that. Together they combed the vessel for what Quorquel had done.

It was plenty. The radio was smashed beyond repair, even in a sky yard. The last message that had come in was one telling of the fall of Io. The injectors and superheaters of the main driving tubes were hopelessly damaged. The momentum they had was what they would always have, neither more nor less, until they locked horns with some wandering hunk of cosmic debris. But no, not necessarily, for they found the antiquated bow tubes still in working condition. Quorquel had not thought it necessary to spend time on them. They were smaller than the main drive and of a different model. Their injec-

tors could not be modified to fit the rear tubes.

Hartwell learned some other discouraging facts. The retrieved water supply was so small as to help hardly at all, though there was plenty of everything else except air. The best that could be said about that was that it would support life—a headache, listless sort of life. If he had water enough, he could electrolyze some and make air; but he hadn't. So, beyond issuing a slightly better food ration, he could do nothing to help the passengers. He did not even tell them of their predicament.

He did select six of the ablest men and call them forward. Two were engineers and one a chemist; two were in the mercantile business, but they had been enthusiastic sky-yachtsmen. The other was superintendent of a scandium refinery. Hartwell told them something about the situation and berthed them, three in Quorquel's room, and three in Larsen's. He and Larsen, since they would be on opposite watches thereafter, moved into the skipper's cabin. That relieved the congestion aft a trifle, and gave him some helpers—if he could find any way to utilize their help.

Then he began a feverish study of the Ephemerides of the Asteroids. The more he searched the more dejected he got. There was not a single inhabited asteroid they could reach in their present condition. In ten days more the water would be gone. After that? Well, he'd have to think up something else.

CHAPTER FIVE

TWO MUST DIE!

IRONICALLY enough, he found an asteroid to lie dead ahead. They would crash on it inevitably unless he could work some miracle—and his fagged brain had run out of what it takes to make miracles. The planetoid was one of the Scrappos—Scrappo IV, to be precise. It was a graveyard for ships, a handy junk pile for the disposition of derelicts so obsolete as to be not worth the cost of breaking up. From his calculations, it looked to Hartwell very

much as if the weary *Wanderer* was about to add her rusty bones to the pile.

He scratched his head, then sent for his newly appointed civilian staff.

"In exactly seven days," he told them, "we smash on Scrappo IV. I don't think we'll actually crack up, but these freighters are cranky to handle under bow tubes alone. Then what? Any ideas?"

There was a long silence. After a bit, one of the engineers spoke up.

"I visited one of the Scrappos once. We could do worse. A great many derelicts have been dumped on them without much done in the way of stripping. Of course, space tramps visit the dumps every now and then and pick about, but we might find something worthwhile—a tube fitting here, another there, and so on. I vote we go on."

"We are going on," said Hartwell, with a grin that was more telling than a flood of oratory could have been, "but let's not deceive ourselves. There may be spare parts enough, if we can find them. But our water will give out a day or so after our arrival. I'm not hopeful of finding that. In the meantime, you fellows circulate among the other passengers and dig out some men for working parties, if you can find any real ones among that batch of pampered aristocrats. If they talk back and tell you how much this voyage has already cost 'em, just tell 'em that from here out it'll be 'root, hog, or die!' There'll be no more water for shirkers."

Hartwell resumed his anxious study of the skies ahead.

Ultimately the hour came when he had to begin deceleration. His new aides proved good men, and handled the tubes well. All in all it was a trying maneuver, for the Scrappo was a dazzling white object, despite its heavy freckling of wreckage, and there were moments when Hartwell thought he would go blind.

But he grounded the ship in what appeared to be a blinding fog—but turned out to be particles of white dust kicked up by the blast. It stayed up for a long time, but eventually settled back to the ground, for there was no air to sustain it. But Scrappo's gravity was not so great, either,

and the white dust was in no hurry to come down.

Hartwell mustered two work parties. That was all he could send out at one time, for there were only a dozen space suits on board. The engineer, Ellison, led one, and Larsen the other. Hartwell watched them leave, but without optimism. There was less than ten gallons of water left, and more than two hundred persons to divide it among. He had won, but he had lost. It looked like the end of the road, for this desolate white planetoid was the driest of deserts—soft, snowy powder.

L ARSEN sent two men back after a bit. They carried a strange burden. Each had a huge bag of dried clumps of rootlets with dead stems hanging limply from them. They were air-plants of the genus *Carbivore Veneris*, insatiable consumers of carbon dioxide, formerly used on ships as air conditioners. They never died—all these needed was soaking in water and

placing in foul air. Then they would burgeon gloriously until whatever hold they were placed in would look like a glen in a Venusian Valley. Hartwell looked at them dubiously. It would take a quarter of the water store to revive them. Much as they needed fresh air, he told the men to dump them in the control room.

Then Ellison returned, delighted. The third ship he had visited was of the *Wanderer's* type, badly smashed forward, but with rear tubes intact. The fittings on at least four of them might be used, though they were somewhat larger. He thought that by interposing reducers—which could be made from other casual junk—they might be made to work.

In the meantime the chemist had been prowling around in the near vicinity. He came back looking as if he had been in a snow storm, but there was a gleam of delight in his eyes. He held out a handful of the white surface stuff of Scrappo IV.

"Here's water," he said, "enough to drown ourselves in. This stuff is gypsum. All you've got to do is heat it and rig a retort to catch the water in."

The statement galvanized his listeners to action. Ellison knew at once what to do. They would construct a huge oven under the stern of the wrecked ship with the serviceable tubes, using a tube to furnish the heat. Collector hoods, which could be made from old bulk heads, would lead the vapour to an old water tank. The passengers could turn to with improvised shovels, providing the ovens with raw gypsum, and cleaning the dehydrated stuff out at times. He thought he could do it in not more than two days.

He did. Four days later the *Wanderer's* tanks were overflowing. Everyone had bathed and had drunk his fill. The airplants cluttered the overhead of the ship throughout, and were spreading their tendrils farther. Now they had air and water, as well as food. They could not find a radio that could be made to work, but they did find a great quantity of rocket fuel. A half-drum here, a quarter-drum there, but the sum of them was more than enough to fill the ship's bunkers.

It was exactly a week after their land-

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ing that Hartwell lifted the *Wanderer* and pointed her Earthward. That was the ultimate destination of most on board, and he saw no point in going on to Mars. It was a longer voyage, but, aside from overcrowding, all on board were happy. The flabby men that had come aboard whimpering with terror were now transformed. All hands looked on the last leg of the trip as a great lark.

HARTWELL spent the last day bringing his log up to date—the true log of the *Wanderer*. That log had been signed every day by Fennery until his desertion, and it began the day he turned back to Io. In it he had put the truth, excepting a fairy tale involving the change of name.

The other log, the one Fennery meant to take with him in the boat, was a mass of clever falsification. It made no mention of turning back after they had left Callisto. On the contrary, it was full of the details of the voyage to Mars until the very date of the desertion. As of that date there was a lurid account of an explosion in the tube room and the killing of most of the crew. A fierce fire instantly swept the ship and the officers were forced to abandon it.

Hartwell smiled a hard smile of joy. Here he had incontrovertible evidence, written in his enemy's own hand, of the vile scheme. Fennery had planned not only to double-cross the I.U. again, at the sacrifice of his crew and passengers, but his crooked company as well.

What Hartwell and Larsen had taken out of the boat was proof of that. Fennery and Quorquel had meant to go to some chosen asteroid, cache their gems and money. Then they would take the void again with only the false log and the insurance papers, and thereby give the impression of being the shipwrecked mariners they pretended to be. The company would collect the insurance, give them their cut; then they could come back and pick up their hoard.

But Hartwell had the hoard, and those who had contributed it as witnesses. More-

over, there was Larsen, now a changed man.

Luna was astern now, and the ship well down into the Earth's stratosphere. Hartwell put her into a glide until he was over the great skyport of New New York.

He landed her at quarantine, and promptly went to the office of the Director of Astronautics. In a few words he gave the outline of his story, then waited until the president of the Interplanetary Underwriters could come.

He laid the two logs on the table and told his story—both stories, that of the *Hyperion* as well as the *Wanderer*. He produced the bags of jewels.

The Director of Astronautics leaned forward and pressed a button.

"Cancel the charter of Stellar Transport," he barked into the transmitter. "Ground all ships, arrest all employees from the president down. Report back."

He turned to Hartwell.

"What else do you want?"

"I want a full exoneration in the *Hyperion* affair and removal from I.U.'s blacklist."

"Done," said the president of the I.U. It was his turn to grab the transmitter.

"Now to pick up Fennery and Quorquel," continued the Director. "What was their point of departure, course and speed? How much supplies did they have?"

Hartwell calmly gave the coordinates of the place of desertion. "The course?" he said, screwing up his nose. "Why, a tight, incurving spiral, with a tendency to drift in our wake. Speed? Just enough to get well clear. There was fuel enough for the initial blast, no food, no water, and what air they happened to have in their helmets."

"Why, man," exclaimed the Director, aghast, "they must be dead by now!"

"Quite probably," said Hartwell.



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Victory Unintentional

By Isaac Asimov

THE spaceship leaked, as the saying goes, like a sieve.

It was supposed to! In fact, that was the whole idea!

The result, of course, was that during the journey from Ganymede to Jupiter, the ship was crammed just as full as it could be with the very hardest space vacuum. And since the ship also lacked heating devices, this space vacuum was at normal temperature, which is a fraction of a degree above absolute zero.

This, also, was according to plan. Little things like the absence of heat and air didn't annoy anyone at all on that particular spaceship.

The first near vacuum wisps of Jovian atmosphere began percolating into the ship several thousand miles above the Jovian surface. It was practically all hydrogen, though perhaps a careful gas analysis might have located a trace of helium as well. The pressure gauges began creeping skywards.

That creep continued at an accelerating pace as the ship dropped downwards in a Jupiter-circling spiral. The pointers of successive gauges, each designed for progressively higher pressures, began to move until they reached the neighborhood of a million or so atmospheres, where figures lost most of their meaning. The temperature, as recorded by thermocouples, rose slowly and erratically, and finally steadied at about seventy below zero, Centigrade.

The ship moved slowly towards the end, plowing its way heavily through a maze of gas molecules that crowded together so closely that hydrogen itself was squeezed to the density of a liquid. Ammonia vapor, drawn from the incredibly vast oceans of that liquid, saturated the horrible atmosphere. The wind, which had begun a

thousand miles higher, had risen to a pitch inadequately described as a hurricane.

It was quite plain long before the ship landed on a fairly large Jovian island, perhaps seven times the size of Asia, that Jupiter was not a very pleasant world.

And yet the three members of the crew thought it was. They were quite convinced it was. But then, the three members of the crew were not exactly human. And neither were they exactly Jovian.

They were simply robots designed on Earth, for Jupiter!

ZZ Three said, "It appears to be a rather desolate place."

ZZ Two joined him and regarded the wind-blasted landscape somberly. "There are structures of some sort in the distance," he said, "which are obviously artificial. I suggest we wait for the inhabitants to come to us."

Across the room, ZZ One listened, but made no reply. He was the first constructed of the three, and half experimental. Consequently, he spoke a little less frequently than his two companions.

The wait was not too long. An air vessel of queer design swooped overhead. More followed. And then a line of ground vehicles approached, took position, and disgorged organisms. Along with these organisms came various inanimate accessories, that might have been weapons. Some of these were borne by a single Jovian, some by several, and some advanced under their own power, with Jovians perhaps inside.

The robots couldn't tell.

ZZ Three said, "They're all around us now. The logical peaceful gesture would be to come out in the open. Agreed?"

It was, and ZZ One shoved open the

heavy door, which was not double, nor, for that matter, particularly airtight.

Their appearance through the door was the signal for an excited stir among the surrounding Jovians. Things were done to several of the very largest of the inanimate accessories, and ZZ Three became aware of a temperature rise on the outer rind of his beryllium-iridium-bronze body.

He glanced at ZZ Two, "Do you feel it? They're aiming heat energy at us, I believe."

ZZ Two indicated his surprise. "I wonder why?"

"Definitely a heat ray of some sort. Look at that!"

One of the rays had been jarred out of alignment for some undiscernible cause, and its line of radiation intersected a brook of sparkling pure ammonia — which promptly boiled furiously.

Three turned to ZZ One, "Make a note of this, One, will you?"

"Sure!" It was to ZZ One that the routine secretarial work fell and his method of taking a note was to make a mental addition to the accurate memory scroll within him. He had already gathered the hour by hour record of every important instrument on board ship during the trip to Jupiter. He added agreeably, "What reason shall I put for the reaction? The human masters would probably enjoy knowing."

"No reason. Or better," Three corrected himself, "no apparent reason. You might say the maximum temperature of the ray was about plus thirty, Centigrade."

Two interrupted, "Shall we try communicating?"

"It would be a waste of time," said Three. "There can't be more than a very few Jovians who know the radio-click code that's been developed between Jupiter and Ganymede. They'll have to send for one, and when he comes, he'll establish contact soon enough. Meanwhile, let's watch them. I don't understand their actions, I tell you frankly."

NOR did understanding come immediately. Heat radiation ceased, and other instruments were brought to the forefront and put into play. Several capsules

fell at the feet of the watching robots, dropping rapidly and forcefully under Jupiter's gravity. They popped open and a blue liquid exuded forming pools which proceeded to shrink rapidly by evaporation.

The nightmare wind whipped the vapors away and where those vapors went, Jovians scrambled out of the way. One was too slow, threshed about wildly, and became very limp and still.

ZZ Two bent, dabbed a finger in one of the pools and stared at the dripping liquid. "I think this is oxygen," he said.

"Oxygen, all right," agreed Three. "This becomes stranger and stranger. It must certainly be a dangerous practice, for I would say that oxygen is poisonous to the creatures. One of them died!"

There was a pause, and then ZZ One, whose greater simplicity led at times to an increased directness of thought, said heavily, "It might be that these strange creatures in a rather childish way are attempting to destroy us."

And Two, struck by the suggestion, answered, "You know, Three, I think you're right!"

There had been a slight lull in Jovian activity and now a new structure was brought up. It possessed a slender rod that pointed skyward through the impenetrable Jovian murk. It stood with a rigidity in that starkly incredible wind that plainly indicated remarkable structural strength. From its tip came a cracking and then a flash that lit up the depths of the atmosphere into a gray fog.

For a moment the robots were bathed in clinging radiance and then Three said thoughtfully, "High-tension electricity! Quite respectable power, too. One, I think you're right. After all, the human masters have told us that these creatures seek to destroy all humanity. And organisms possessing such insane viciousness as to harbor a thought of harm against a human being—" his voice trembled at the thought — "would scarcely scruple at attempting to destroy us."

"It's a shame to have such distorted minds," said ZZ One. "Poor fellows!"

"I find it a very saddening thought,"

admitted Two. "Let's go back to the ship. We've seen enough for now."

They did so, and settled down to wait. As ZZ Three said, Jupiter was a roomy planet, and it might take time for Jovian transportation to bring a radio code expert to the ship. However, patience is a cheap commodity to robots.

As a matter of fact, Jupiter turned on its axis three times, according to chronometer, before the expert arrived. The rising and setting of the sun made no difference, of course, to the dead darkness at the bottom of three thousand miles of liquid-dense gas, so that one could not speak of day and night. But then, neither Jovian nor robot saw by visible light radiation and so that didn't matter.

Through this thirty-hour interval, the surrounding Jovians continued their attack with a patience and persevering relentlessness concerning which robot ZZ One made a good many mental notes. The ship was assaulted by as many varieties of forces as there were hours, and the robots observed every attack attentively, analyzing such weapons as they recognized. They by no means recognized all.

But the human masters had built well. The ship and the robots had taken fifteen years to construct, and their essentials could be expressed in a single phrase—raw strength. The attack spent itself uselessly and neither ship nor robot seemed the worse for it.

Three said, "This atmosphere handicaps them, I think. They can't use atomic disruptors, since they would only tear a hole in that soupy air and blow themselves up."

"They haven't used high explosives either," said Two, "which is well. They couldn't have hurt us, naturally, but it would have thrown us about a bit."

"High explosives are out of the question. You can't have an explosive without gas expansion and gas just can't expand in this atmosphere."

"It's a very good atmosphere," muttered One. "I like it."

WHICH was natural, because he was built for it. The ZZ robots were the first robots ever turned out by the United

States Robot and Mechanical Men Corp. that were not even faintly human in appearance. They were low and squat, with a center of gravity less than a foot above ground level. They had six legs apiece, stumpy and thick, designed to lift tons against two and a half times normal Earth gravity. Their reflexes were that many times Earth-normal speed, to make up for the gravity. And they were composed of a beryllium-iridium-bronze alloy, that was proof against any known corrosive agent, also any known destructive agent short of a thousand megatron atomic disruptor, under any conditions whatsoever.

To dispense with further description, they were indestructible, and so impressively powerful that they were the only robots ever built on whom the roboticists of the corporation had never quite had the nerve to pin a serial number nickname. One bright young fellow had suggested Sissy One, Two, and Three—but not in a very loud voice, and the suggestion was never repeated.

The last hours of the wait were spent in a puzzled discussion to find a possible description of a Jovian's appearance. ZZ One had made a note of their possession of tentacles and of their radial symmetry—and there he had struck. Two and Three did their best, but couldn't help.

"You can't very well describe anything," Three declared finally, "without a standard of reference. These creatures are like nothing I know of—completely outside the positronic paths of my brain. It's like trying to describe gamma light to a robot unequipped for gamma ray reception."

It was just at that time that the weapon barrage ceased once more. The robots turned their attention to outside the ship.

A group of Jovians were advancing in curiously uneven fashion, but no amount of careful watching could determine the exact method of their locomotion. How they used their tentacles was uncertain. At times, the organisms took on a remarkable slithering motion, and then they moved at great speed, perhaps with the wind's help, for they were moving downwind.

The robots stepped out to meet the Jovians, who halted ten feet away. Both sides remained silent and motionless.

ZZ said, "They must be watching us, but I don't know how. Do either of you see any photo-sensitive organs?"

"I can't say," grunted Three in response. "I don't see anything about them that makes sense at all."

There was a sudden metallic clicking from among the Jovian group and ZZ One said delightedly, "It's the radio code. They've got the communications expert here."

It was, and they had! The complicated dot-dash system that over a period of twenty-five years had been laboriously developed by the beings of Jupiter and the Earthmen of Ganymede into a remarkably flexible means of communication, was finally being put into practice at close range.

One Jovian remained in the forefront now, the others having fallen back. It was he that was speaking. The clicking said: "Where are you from?"

ZZ Three, as the most mentally advanced, naturally assumed spokesmanship for the robot group. "We are from Jupiter's satellite, Ganymede."

The Jovian continued, "What do you want?"

"Information. We have come to study your world and to bring back our findings. If we could have your cooperation—"

The Jovian clicking interrupted, "You must be destroyed!"

ZZ Three paused and said in a thoughtful aside to his two companions, "Exactly the attitude the human masters said they would take. They are very unusual."

Returning to his clicking, he asked simply, "Why?"

The Jovian evidently considered certain questions too obnoxious to be answered. He said, "If you leave within a single period of revolution, we will spare you—until such time as we emerge from our world to destroy the un-Jovian vermin of Ganymede."

"I would like to point out," said Three, "that we of Ganymede and the inner planets—"

The Jovian interrupted, "Our astronomy knows of the sun and of our four satellites. There are no inner planets."

Three conceded the point wearily. "We of Ganymede, then. We have no designs on Jupiter. We're prepared to offer friendship. For twenty-five years your people communicated freely with the human beings of Ganymede. Is there any reason to make sudden war upon the humans?"

"For twenty-five years," was the cold response, "we assumed the inhabitants of Ganymede to be Jovians. When we found out they were not, and that we had been treating lower animals on the scale of Jovian intelligences, we were bound to take steps to wipe out the dishonor."

Slowly and forcefully he finished, "We of Jupiter will suffer the existence of no vermin!"

The Jovian was backing away in some fashion, tacking against the wind, and the interview was evidently over.

The robots retreated inside the ship.

ZZ TWO said, "It looks bad, doesn't it?" He continued thoughtfully, "It is as the human masters said. They possess an ultimately developed superiority complex, combined with an extreme intolerance for anyone or anything that disturbs that complex."

"The intolerance," observed Three, "is the natural consequence of the complex. The trouble is that their intolerance has teeth in it. They have weapons—and their science is great."

"I am not surprised now," burst out ZZ One, "that we were specifically instructed to disregard Jovian orders. They are horrible, intolerant, pseudo-superior beings!" He added emphatically, with robotic loyalty and faith, "No human master could ever be like that."

"That, though true, is beside the point," said Three. "The fact remains that the human masters are in terrible danger. This is a gigantic world and these Jovians are greater in numbers and resources by a hundred times or more than the humans of the entire Terrestrial Empire. If they can ever develop the force, aimed to the point

where they can use it as a spaceship hull—as the human masters have already done—they will overrun the system at will. The question remains as to how far they have advanced in that direction, what other weapons they have, what preparations they are making, and so on. To return with that information is our function, of course, and we had better decide on our next step."

"It may be difficult," said Two. "The Jovians won't help us." Which, at the moment, was rather an understatement.

Three thought a while. "It seems to me that we need only wait," he observed. "They have tried to destroy us for thirty hours now and haven't succeeded. Certainly they have done their best. Now a superiority complex always involves the eternal necessity of saving face, and the ultimatum given us proves it in this case. They would never allow us to leave if they could destroy us. But if we don't leave then, rather than admit they cannot force us away, they will surely pretend that they are willing, for their own purposes, to have us stay."

Once again, they waited. The day passed. The weapon barrage did not resume. The robots did not leave. The bluff was called. And now the robots faced the Jovian radio code expert once again.

If the ZZ models had been equipped with a sense of humor, they would have enjoyed themselves immensely. As it was, they felt merely a solemn sense of satisfaction.

The Jovian said, "It has been our decision that you will be allowed to remain for a very short time, so that you may see our power for yourself. You shall then return to Ganymede to inform your companion vermin of the disastrous end to which they will unfailingly come within a solar revolution."

ZZ One made a mental note that a Jovian revolution took twelve Earthly years.

Three replied casually, "Thank you. May we accompany you to the nearest town? There are many things we would like to learn." He added as an afterthought, "Our ship is not to be touched, of course."

He said this as a request, not as a threat, for no ZZ model was ever pugnacious. All capacity for even the slightest annoyance had been carefully barred in their construction. With robots as vastly powerful as the ZZ's, unfailing good temper was essential for safety during the years of testing on Earth.

The Jovian said, "We are not interested in your verminous ship. No Jovian will pollute himself by approaching it. You may accompany us, but you must on no account approach closer than ten feet to any Jovian, or you will be instantly destroyed."

"Stuck up, aren't they?" observed Two in a genial whisper, as they plowed into the wind.

THE town was a port on the shores of an incredible ammonia lake. The eternal wind whipped furious, frothy waves that shot across the liquid surface at the hectic rate enforced by the gravity. The port itself was neither large nor impressive and it seemed fairly evident that most of the construction was underground.

"What is the population of this place?" asked Three.

The Jovian replied: "It is a small town of ten million."

"I see. Make a note of that, One."

ZZ One did so mechanically, and then turned once more to the lake, at which he had been staring in fascination. He pulled at Three's elbow. "Say, do you suppose they have fish here?"

"What difference does it make?"

"I think we ought to know. The human masters ordered us to find out everything we could." Of the robots, One was the simplest and consequently, the one who took orders in the most literal fashion.

Two said, "Let One go and look if he likes. It won't do any harm if we let the kid have his fun."

"All right. There's no real objection if he doesn't waste his time. Fish isn't what we came for—but go ahead, One."

ZZ One made off in great excitement and slogged rapidly down the beach, plunging into the ammonia with a splash.

The Jovians watched attentively. They had understood none of the previous conversation, of course.

The radio code expert clicked out, "It is apparent that your companion has decided to abandon life in despair at our greatness."

Three said in surprise, "Nothing of the sort. He wants to investigate the living organisms, if any, that live in the ammonia." He added apologetically, "Our friend is very curious at times, and he isn't quite as bright as we are, though that is only his misfortune. We understand that and try to humor him whenever we can."

There was a long pause, and the Jovian observed, "He will drown."

Three replied casually, "No danger of that. We don't drown. May we enter the town as soon as he returns?"

At that moment there was a spurt of liquid several hundred feet out in the lake. It sprayed upward wildly and then hurtled down in a wind-driven mist. Another spurt and another, then a wild white foaming that formed a trail toward shore, gradually quieting as it approached.

The two robots watched this in amazement and the utter lack of motion on the part of the Jovians indicated that they were watching as well.

Then the head of ZZ One broke the surface and he made his slow way out on to dry land. But something followed him! Some organism of gigantic size, that seemed nothing but fangs, claws, and spines. Then they saw that it wasn't following him under its own power, but was being dragged across the beach by ZZ One. There was a significant flabbiness about it.

ZZ One approached rather timidly and took communication into his own hands. He tapped out a message to the Jovian in agitated fashion. "I am very sorry this happened, but the thing attacked me. I was merely taking notes on it. It is not a valuable creature, I hope."

He was not answered immediately, for at the first appearance of the monster there had been a wild break in the Jovian ranks. These re-formed slowly, and cautious observation having proven the creature to be indeed dead, order was restored.

Some of the bolder were curiously prodding the body.

ZZ Three said humbly, "I hope you will pardon our friend. He is sometimes clumsy. We have absolutely no intention of harming any Jovian creature."

"He attacked me," explained One. "He bit at me without provocation. See!" And he displayed a two-foot fang that ended in a jagged break. "He broke it on my shoulder and almost left a scratch. I just slapped it a bit to send it away—and it died. I'm sorry!"

The Jovian finally spoke and his code-clicking was a rather stuttery affair. "It is a wild creature, rarely found so close to shore, but the lake is deep just here."

Three said, still anxiously, "If you can use it for food, we are only too glad—"

"No. We can get food for ourselves without the help of vermin—without the help of others. Eat it yourselves."

At that ZZ One heaved the creature up and back into the sea, with an easy motion of one arm. Three said casually, "Thank you for your kind offer, but we have no use for food. We don't eat, of course."

ESCORTED by two hundred or so armed Jovians, the robots passed down a series of ramps into the underground city. If, above the surface, the city had looked small and unimpressive, then from beneath, it took on the appearance of a vast megalopolis.

They were ushered into ground-cars that were operated by remote control—for no honest, self-respecting Jovian would risk his superiority by placing himself in the same car with vermin—and driven at frightful speed to the center of the town. They saw enough to decide that it extended fifty miles from end to end and reached downward into Jupiter's crust at least eight miles.

ZZ Two did not sound happy as he said, "If this is a sample of Jovian development then we shall not have a hopeful report to bring back to the human masters. After all, we landed on the vast surface of Jupiter at random, with the chances a thousand to one against coming near any really concentrated center of population.

This must be, as the code expert says, a mere town."

"Ten million Jovians," said Three, abstractedly. "Total population must be in the trillions, which is high, very high, even for Jupiter. They probably have a completely urban civilization, which means that their scientific development must be tremendous. If they have force fields—"

Three had no neck, for in the interest of strength the heads of the ZZ models were riveted firmly onto the torso with the delicate positronic brains protected by three separate layers of inch-thick iridium alloy. But if he had had one, he would have shaken his head dolefully.

They had stopped now in a cleared space. Everywhere about them they could see avenues and structures crowded with Jovians, as curious as any Terrestrial crowd would have been in similar circumstances.

The code expert approached. "It is time now for me to retire until the next period of activity. We have gone so far as to arrange quarters for you at great inconvenience to ourselves for, of course, the structure will have to be pulled down and rebuilt afterwards. Nevertheless, you will be allowed to sleep for a space."

ZZ Three waved an arm in deprecation and tapped out, "We thank you but you must not trouble yourself. We don't mind remaining right here. If you want to sleep and rest, by all means do. We'll wait for you. As for us," casually, "we don't sleep."

The Jovian said nothing, though if it had had a face, the expression upon it might have been interesting. It left, and the robots remained in the car, with squads of well-armed Jovians, frequently replaced, surrounding them as guards.

I T was hours before the ranks of those guards parted to allow the code expert to return. Along with him were other Jovians, whom he introduced.

"There are with me two officials of the central government who have graciously consented to speak with you."

One of the officials evidently knew the code, for his clicking interrupted the code expert sharply. He addressed the robots,

"Vermin! Emerge from the ground-car that we may look at you."

The robots were only too willing to comply, so while Three and Two vaulted over the right side of the car, ZZ One dashed through the left side. The word through is used advisedly, for since he neglected to work the mechanism that lowered a section of side so that one might exit, he carried that side, plus two wheels and an axle, along with him. The car collapsed, and ZZ One stood staring at the ruins in embarrassed silence.

At last he clicked out gently, "I'm very sorry. I hope it wasn't an expensive car."

ZZ Two added apologetically, "Our companion is often clumsy. You must excuse him," and ZZ Three made a half-hearted attempt to put the car back together again.

ZZ One made another effort to excuse himself. "The material of the car was rather flimsy. You see?" he lifted a square-yard sheet of three-inch thick, metal-hard plastic in both hands and exerted a bit of pressure. The sheet promptly snapped in two. "I should have made allowances," he admitted.

The Jovian government official said in slightly less sharp fashion, "The car would have had to be destroyed anyway, since being polluted by your presence." He paused, then: "Creatures! We Jovians lack vulgar curiosity concerning lower animals, but our scientists seek facts."

"We're right with you," replied Three, cheerfully, "so do we."

The Jovian ignored him. "You lack the mass-sensitive organ, apparently. How is it that you are aware of distant objects?"

Three grew interested, "Do you mean your people are directly sensitive to mass?"

"I am not here to answer your questions—your impudent questions—about us."

"I take it then that objects of low specific mass would be transparent to you, even in the absence of radiation." He turned to Two, "That's how they see. Their atmosphere is as transparent as space to them."

The Jovian clicking began once more, "You will answer my first question immediately, or my patience will end and I will order you destroyed."

Three said at once, "We are energy-sensitive, Jovian. We can adjust ourselves to the entire electromagnetic scale at will. At present, our long-distance sight is due to radio-wave radiation that we emit ourselves, and at close range, we see by—" He paused, and said to Two, "There isn't any code word for gamma ray, is there?"

"Not that I know of," Two answered.

Three continued to the Jovian, "At close range we see by other radiation for which there is no code word."

"Of what is your body composed?" demanded the Jovian.

Two whispered, "He probably asks that because his mass-sensitivity can't penetrate past our skin. High density, you know. Ought we to tell him?"

Three replied uncertainly, "Our human masters didn't particularly say we were to keep anything secret." In radio code, to the Jovian, he said, "We are mostly iridium. For the rest copper, tin, a little beryllium, and a scattering of other substances."

The Jovians fell back and by the obscure writhing of various portions of their thoroughly indescribable bodies gave the impression that they were in animated conversation, although they made no sound.

And then the official returned. "Beings of Ganymede! It has been decided to show you through some of our factories that we may exhibit a tiny part of our great achievements. We will then allow you to return so that you may spread despair among the other vermin—the other beings of the outer world."

Three said to Two, "Note the effect of their psychology. They must hammer home their superiority. It's still a matter of saving face." And in radio code, "We thank you for the opportunity."

BUT the face-saving was efficient, as the robots realized soon enough. The demonstration became a tour, and the tour a Grand Exhibition. The Jovians displayed everything, explained everything, answered all questions eagerly, and ZZ One made hundreds of despairing notes.

The war-potential of that single so-called unimportant town was greater by several

times than that of all Ganymede. Ten more such towns would out-produce all the Terrestrial Empire. Yet ten more such towns would not be the fingernail fragment of the strength all Jupiter must be able to exert.

Three turned as One nudged him, "What is it?"

ZZ One said seriously, "If they have force fields, the human masters are lost, aren't they?"

"I'm afraid so. Why do you ask?"

"Because the Jovians aren't showing us through the right wing of this factory. It might be that force fields are being developed there. They would be wanting to keep it secret if they were. We'd better find out. It's the main point, you know."

Three regarded One soberly. "Perhaps you're right. It's no use ignoring anything."

They were in a huge steel mill now, watching hundred-foot beams of ammonia resistant silicon-steel alloy being turned out twenty to the second. Three asked quietly, "What does that wing contain?"

The government official inquired of those in charge of the factory and explained: "That is the section of great heat. Various processes require huge temperatures which life cannot bear, and they must all be handled indirectly."

He led the way to a partition from which heat could be felt to radiate, and indicated a small, round area of transparent material. It was one of a row of such, through which the foggy red light of lines of glowing forges could be made out through the soupy atmosphere.

ZZ One fastened a look of suspicion on the Jovian and clicked out, "Would it be all right if I went in and looked around? I am very interested in this."

Three said, "You're being childish, One. They're telling the truth. Oh, well, nose around if you must. But don't take too long; we've got to move on."

The Jovian said, "You have no understanding of the heat involved. You will die."

"Oh no!" explained One casually. "Heat doesn't bother us."

There was a Jovian conference, and then a scene of scurrying confusion as the life

of the factory was geared to this unusual emergency. Screens of heat-absorbent material were set up, and then a door dropped open, a door that had never before budged while the forges were working. ZZ One entered and the door closed behind him. Jovian officials crowded to the transparent areas to watch.

ZZ One walked to the nearest forge and tapped the outside. Since he was too short to see into it comfortably, he tipped the forge until the molten metal licked at the lip of the container. He peered at it curiously, then dipped his hand in and stirred it awhile to test the consistency. Having done this, he withdrew his hand, shook off some of the fiery metallic droplets and wiped the rest on one of his six thighs. Slowly, he went down the line of forges, then signified his desire to leave.

The Jovians retired to a great distance when he came out the door and played a stream of ammonia on him, which hissed, bubbled and steamed until he was brought to bearable temperature once more.

ZZ One ignored the ammonia shower and said, "They were telling the truth. No force fields!"

Three began, "You see—" but One interrupted impatiently, "But there's no use delaying. The human masters instructed us to find out everything and that's that."

He turned to the Jovian and clicked out, without the slightest hesitation, "Listen, has Jovian science developed force fields?"

The Jovian official relaxed slowly from his strangely stiffened attitude, which had somehow given the impression that he had been staring stupidly at One's hand—the one he had dipped into the molten metal.

The Jovian said slowly, "Force fields? That, then, is your main object of curiosity?"

"Yes," said One, with emphasis.

There was a sudden and patent gain in confidence on the Jovian's part, for the clicking grew sharper, "Then come, vermin!"

Whereupon Three said to Two, "We're vermin again, I see—which sounds as if there's bad news ahead." And Two gloomily agreed.

It was to the very edge of the city that they were now led—to the portion which on Earth would have been termed the suburbs—and into one of a series of closely integrated structures, which might have corresponded vaguely to a Terrestrial university.

There were no explanations, however, and none were asked for. The Jovian official led the way rapidly, and the robots followed with the grim conviction that the worst was just about to happen.

It was ZZ One who stopped before an opened wall-section after the rest had passed on. "What's this?" he wanted to know.

The room was equipped with narrow, low benches, along which Jovians manipulated rows of strange devices, of which strong inch-long electro-magnets formed the principal feature.

"What's this?" asked One again.

The Jovian turned back and exhibited impatience. "This is a students' biological laboratory. There's nothing there to interest you."

"But what are they doing?"

"They are studying microscopic life. Haven't you ever seen a microscope before?"

Three interrupted in explanation, "He has, but not that type. Our microscopes are meant for energy-sensitive organs and work by refraction of radiant energy. Your microscopes evidently work on a mass-expansion basis. Rather ingenious."

ZZ One said, "Would it be all right if I inspected some of your specimens?"

"Of what use will that be? You cannot use our microscopes because of your sensory limitations and it will simply force us to discard such specimens as you approach for no decent reason."

"But I don't need a microscope," explained One, with surprise. "I can easily adjust myself for microscopic vision."

He strode to the nearest bench, while the students in the room crowded to the corner in an attempt to avoid contamination. ZZ One shoved a microscope aside, and inspected the slide carefully. He backed away puzzled; then tried another, a third, a fourth.

He came back and addressed the Jovian. "Those are supposed to be alive, aren't they? I mean, those little wormthings."

The Jovian said, "Certainly."

"That's strange! When I look at them—they die!"

Three explained sharply, and said to his two companions, "We've forgotten our gamma-ray radiation. Let's get out of here, One, or we'll kill every bit of microscopic life in the room."

He turned to the Jovian, "I'm afraid that our presence is fatal to weaker forms of life. We had better leave. We hope the specimens are not too difficult to replace. And, while we're about it, you had better not stay too near us, or our radiation may affect you adversely. You feel all right so far, don't you?" he asked.

The Jovian led the way onward in proud silence, but it was to be noticed that thereafter he doubled the distance he had hitherto kept between himself and them.

Nothing more was said until the robots found themselves in a vast room. In the very center of it huge ingots of metal rested unsupported in mid-air—or, rather, supported by nothing visible—against the mighty Jovian gravity.

The Jovian clicked, "There is your force field in ultimate form, as recently perfected. Within that bubble is a vacuum, so that it is supporting the full weight of our atmosphere plus an amount of metal equivalent to two large spaceships. What do you say to that?"

"That space travel now becomes a possibility for you," said Three.

"Definitely. No metal or plastic has the strength to hold our atmosphere against a vacuum; but a force field can—and a force field bubble will be our spaceship! Within the year, we will be turning them out by the hundreds of thousands. Then we will swarm down upon Ganymede to destroy the verminous so-called intelligences that attempt to dispute our dominion of the universe."

"The human beings of Ganymede have never attempted—" began Three, in mild expostulation.

"Silence!" snapped the Jovian. "Return now and tell them what you've seen. Their

own feeble force fields—such as the one your ship is equipped with—will not stand against us, for our smallest ship will be a hundred times the size and power of yours."

Three said, "Then there's nothing more to do and we will return, as you say, with the information. If you could lead us back to our ship, we'll say good-by. But by the way, just as a matter for the record, there's something you don't understand. The humans of Ganymede have force fields, of course, but our particular ship isn't equipped with one. We don't need any."

The robot turned away and motioned his companions to follow. For a moment they did not speak, then ZZ One muttered dejectedly, "Can't we try to destroy this place?"

"It won't help," said Three. "They'd get us by weight of numbers. It's no use. In an earthly decade, the human masters will be finished. It is impossible to stand against Jupiter. There's just too damn much of it. As long as they were tied to the surface, the humans were safe. But now that they have force fields . . . All we can do is to bring the news. By the preparation of hiding places, some few may survive for a short while."

THE city was behind them. They were out on the open plain by the lake with their ship a dark spot on the horizon when the Jovian spoke suddenly:

"Creatures, you say you have no force field?"

Three replied without interest, "We don't need one."

"How then does your ship stand the vacuum of space without exploding because of the atmospheric pressure within?" And he moved a tentacle as if in mute gesture at the Jovian atmosphere that was weighing down upon them with a force of twenty million pounds to the square inch.

"Well," explained Three, "that's simple. Our ship isn't airtight. Pressures equalize within and without."

"Even in space? A vacuum in your ship? You lie!"

"You're welcome to inspect our ship. It has no force field and it isn't airtight."

What's marvelous about that? We don't breathe. Our energy is through direct atomic power. The presence or absence of air pressure makes little difference to us and we're quite at home in a vacuum."

"But absolute zero!"

"It doesn't matter. We regulate our own heat. We're not interested in outside temperatures." He paused. "Well, we can make our own way back to the ship. Good-by. We'll give the humans of Ganymede your message—war to the end!"

But the Jovian said, "Wait! I'll be back." He turned and went toward the city.

It was three hours before he returned and when he did, it was in breathless haste. He stopped within the usual ten feet of the robots, but then began inching his way forward in a curious groveling fashion. He did not speak until his rubbery gray skin was almost touching them, and then the radio code sounded, subdued and respectful.

"Honored sirs, I have been in communication with the head of our central government, who is now aware of all the facts, and I can assure you that Jupiter desires only peace."

"I beg your pardon," said Three, blankly.

The Jovian drove on hastily. "We are ready to resume communication with Ganymede and will gladly promise to make no attempt to venture out into space. Our force field will be used only on the Jovian surface."

"But—" Three began.

"Our government will be glad to receive any other representatives our honorable human brothers of Ganymede would care to send. If your honors will now condescend to swear peace—" A scaly tentacle swung out towards them, and Three, quite dazed, grasped it. Two and One did likewise to two more were extended to them.

The Jovian said solemnly: "There is then eternal peace between Jupiter and Ganymede."

THE spaceship which leaked like a sieve was out in space again. The pressure and temperature were once more at zero,

and the robots watched the huge but steadily shrinking globe that was Jupiter.

"They're definitely sincere," said ZZ Two, "and it's very gratifying, this complete about-face, but I don't get it."

"It is my idea," observed ZZ One, "that the Jovians came to their senses just in time and realized the incredible evil involved in the thought of harm to a human master. That would be only natural."

ZZ Three sighed and said, "Look, friends, it's all a matter of psychology. Those Jovians had a superiority complex a mile thick and when they couldn't destroy us, they were bound to save face. All their exhibitions, all their explanations, were simply a form of braggadocio, designed to impress us into the proper state of humiliation before their power and superiority."

"I see all that," interrupted Two, "but—"

Three went on, "But it worked the wrong way. All they did was to prove to themselves that we were stronger, that we didn't drown, that we didn't eat or sleep, that molten metal didn't burn us. Even our very presence was fatal to Jovian life. Their last trump was the force field. But when they found out that *we* didn't need them at all, and could live in a vacuum at absolute zero, they broke." He paused, and added philosophically, "When a superiority complex like that breaks, it breaks all the way."

The other two considered that, and then Two said, "But it still doesn't make sense. Why should they care what we can or can't do? We're only robots. We're not the ones they have to fight."

"And that's the whole point, Two," said Three, softly. "It's only after we left Jupiter that I thought of it. Do you know that through an oversight, quite unintentionally, we neglected to tell them we were only robots?"

"They never asked us," said One.

"Exactly. So they thought we were human beings and that all human beings were like us!"

He looked once more at Jupiter, thoughtfully. "No wonder they decided to quit!"



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CHAM of the HILLS

~~~~~By Charles R. Tanner~~~~~



Last of their kind were they, the remnants of a world gone mad, the lean-jawed fighting men who followed a strange lost chieftain—Cham of the Hills, who had sworn to set his people free!

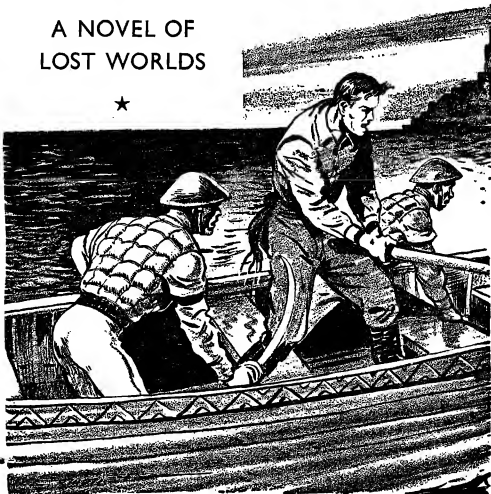
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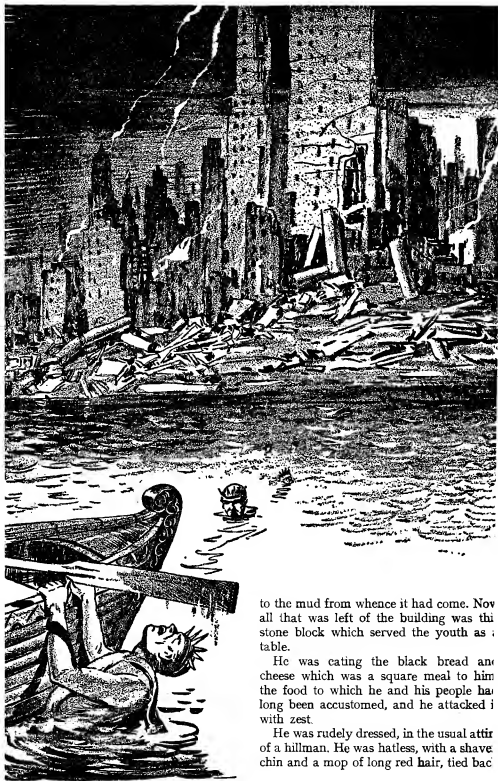


## CHAPTER ONE

### DOUBLE TROUBLE

HE sat on a big, moss-covered granite boulder, a boulder that had once been the cornerstone of a huge apartment building sheltering a hundred families. It had been a splendid thing of wire-cut brick and steel in its day, but the steel had long since rusted and the brick had returned





to the mud from whence it had come. Now all that was left of the building was this stone block which served the youth as a table.

He was eating the black bread and cheese which was a square meal to him the food to which he and his people had long been accustomed, and he attacked it with zest.

He was rudely dressed, in the usual attire of a hillman. He was hatless, with a shaved chin and a mop of long red hair, tied back

with a fillet. The bright red sash he wore separated the white shirt from worn brown trousers that were tucked into his half-boots. At his side, hanging from a leather belt that was strapped on over the sash, hung a long sword in a worn and rusty looking scabbard. The mud on his boots showed clearly that he had been journeying, and it would not have taken an especially clear mind to deduce that here was one of the hillmen of Dronadac, come to seek his fortune in the city of Niarc.

His meal finished, he wiped his lips on the back of a freckled hand; then, dusting off the crumbs of bread and cheese from his trousers, he set off toward the city to the south. He had spent the whole morning wandering through the farmlands of Bronnis and he knew that it would not be very long before he reached the northern limits of the city.

Presently he topped a rise and strode down to where a rude bridge crossed a shallow, sluggish river. As he approached it, a man emerged from a little shanty built by the bridge, a huge black man clad in the tight-fitting, quilted, scarlet uniform of the Niarcan soldiers.

The red-haired hillman eyed him curiously, for though he had often heard of the Harlings, those black dwellers in the northern part of the city, he had never before seen one. The black-skinned Harling watched the hillman's approach truculently, and, as the latter paused uncertainly, he raised a long staff he carried and barred the way to the bridge.

Cham fumbled in his sash and brought out a big copper *daim*, the coin usually given at toll bridges. He tossed it to the Harling, who seized it and tucked it away in the pocket of his shirt. But he still barred the way to the bridge.

"They like to know who enters the city," he said gruffly. "They don't like too many foreigners in the city these days."

The hillman grinned. "I'm not a foreigner," he announced. "I'm Cham, of Saroon. That's a town up by Lake Saroon, in the hills of Dronadac. We're loyal to Hendrik, up there, and I've heard there was going to be a war, so I've come down to join the army."

A smile spread over the black man's face at this statement. He looked the red-topped hillman up and down, and the smile spread and became a chuckle, then a laugh, and at last a guffaw. He slapped his thigh and whooped his pleasure.

"You're going to be a great help to King Hendrik," he cried, walking around to the hillman's back as if to view him from all angles. "Where'd you ever learn to be a soldier, hillman?"

Cham scowled. "From better men than you will ever be, Harling!" he snorted angrily. "My uncles were *ophzars* in the guard of the King of Behostun."

"They should have taught you something about soldiers' dress then," the Harling sneered. "You'll be a sight for sore eyes in the city. But go ahead," he went on, dropping his staff. "I suppose before long they'll give you a captain's uniform to take the place of those clothes of yours."

Cham might have answered hotly, but he reflected that he was in the city now and had better not get into trouble until he had learned a little more of the city people and their ways. So, paying no more attention to the dusky guardian of the bridge, he passed across it and into that section of the island which for hundreds of years had been the domain of the Harlings.

HE could have passed through this section in an hour or so if he had wished, but the sights that now confronted his eyes so amazed and interested him that the hours passed unnoticed while he wandered from one spot to another.

Foremost among the wonders was his first distant look at the High City, the great ruins towering up far to the south. Like huge skeletons of long-dead monsters, the rusting steel framework stood, their outer covering of brick and stone in most cases long since fallen away. Just to see those tremendous works on the distant southern horizon gave Cham a feeling of awe, a weird, uneasy feeling that he had not felt since the days, long ago, when as a child his mother had frightened him with stories of the wonderful doings of the wizards of old who had builded them.

But the ruins were not the only things that excited Cham's interest. There were the markets, where dark-haired white men with big noses and rings in their ears bargained and quarreled with the Harlings as they bartered the goods they had brought from afar for the goods that were made in the homes of the Harlings.

Then there was a street preacher, exhorting a crowd of shouting and singing listeners. And once he stood for an hour and watched a group of dark-skinned men and boys engaged in a complicated game played on the ground with two small cubes of bone.

These sights so interested him that he soon realized it would be useless to try to reach the High City that night, so he looked about to find an inn. The one he chose at last was a small unassuming place, and Cham chose it largely because he felt that its very smallness would make it safer and less likely to be frequented by the thieves who made most of the inns dangerous shelter indeed.

He entered this inn and after ordering the Harling landlord to prepare him a room, he sat down at a table and called for beer and tobacco. Even before it was brought, he noted with some surprise that he was not the only white man in the place. Across the room and closer to the bar, two soldiers sat, one tall, dark and eagle-beaked, the other shorter, with mild blue eyes and a cherubic countenance, a man as fair as his companion was dark.

They were dressed in the usual quilted uniform; they boasted each a brace of crude pistols which the more affluent fighters could afford, and their shields, hanging over their right shoulders, were without insignia of any kind. This, and the fact that their clothes were of a light blue shade, showed that they were mercenaries, free men who had evidently not yet been accepted into the army of King Hendrik.

They were in a jolly mood, chattering volubly and now and then bursting into a bit of song when they started a new mug of beer. Cham warned to them as he watched them over the rim of his own mug, and wondered, a little enviously, if perhaps

in a few years he too might not be such as they.

But the Harlings gathered around the bar and seated at the other tables did not seem to share Cham's opinion of the mercenaries. They had paid little enough attention to them at first, but a little brown fellow had entered shortly after Cham, and the hillman could have sworn he saw recognition and then antagonism in his eyes when he spied the mercenaries.

Thereafter, the little Harling had gone from table to table, and to the bar; and though his conversation had been seemingly light and inconsequential, Cham saw sidelong glances cast in the direction of the two mercenaries, glances that seemed to bode little good for them. The hillman loosened his sword in its scabbard for, come what may, it seemed a good time to be ready for anything.

It was well that he had prepared himself, for presently a big Harling detached himself from the group by the bar. He strolled over and began a conversation with the mercenaries. It was brief and pointed and spoken too low for Cham to catch the words, but suddenly the taller of the mercenaries spat out an oath and sprang upon the Harling. The others in the room acted at once, as though this was a signal they had long been waiting for.

Those at the bar hurled themselves immediately at the two mercenaries, but they were not to be caught napping. They leaped to their feet instantly; their swords were out almost before they were up, and in a trice they were standing back to back, their swords making a veritable wall of steel about them.

WHEN Cham leaped to his feet, he was still uncertain whether he should go to the aid of the others or not, but as he rose, a burly Harling darted past him, intent on joining the fray. Instantly the hillman made his decision; almost instinctively his foot darted out and the Harling, stumbling over it, sprawled to the floor. He rolled over as he fell, cursing wildly, his sword swinging up to a parry, but he was just a fraction of a second too late to

avoid a vicious downward cut from Cham's own weapon.

There was a cry of "Here's another one. Get him too!" Out of the corner of his eye, Cham saw two of the Harlings stop in their rush toward the mercenaries and turn toward him. With his free hand he seized the stool he had been sitting on and hurled it straight into the face of the foremost of his opponents, then snatched up another and, using it as a shield, rushed toward the second.

The fellow gave a cry and fled as if in panic. Cham would have pursued him had not the first fellow been just a little too eager in his strategy. He was not as badly hurt as he had pretended when he fell; he and his friend intended to get on either side of Cham and thus finish him off easily. But the hillman caught the first man's furtive move, and as he passed him he swung out with a savage back-handed cut that rendered the fellow *hors de combat*—permanently.

The flight of the other one was in earnest now. He had seen Cham put two of his fellows out of the fight in as many minutes, and he had no stomach to face him. In his flight, he stumbled against one of the Harlings who was engaging the tall mercenary. In the second that the black one wavered off balance, the tall one's sword sped instantly true to the heart of his opponent.

For a moment the ring around the mercenaries was broken. Cham rushed in and took his place by their side and was rewarded by a grin from the tall one. He was panting from exertion but he found time to say, "Your help is welcome, hillman. If three such fighters as we are can't fight our way out of this, we can at least leave a mark that the Harlings will not soon forget."

Another Harling fell as he spoke, this time to the sword of the little blond fellow. The tall one, schooled in the strategy of war, was quick to see the advantage.

"The way to the door is clear," he cried. "Outside, quick! We can't expect to send this whole group to whatever heaven they believe in. Outside, and we'll run for it!" Suiting the action to the word he dashed

to the exit, followed immediately by his comrade and by Cham.

It was dark without; apparently most of the people who had crowded the streets earlier in the day were now home to supper. This probably saved their lives, for as they sped down the street, there came shouts and cries from the Harlings who poured out of the tavern; and had not the streets been fairly deserted, the three might have been captured at once.

"To the river, Chimra," shouted the tall mercenary. "To the river, hillman. If we can reach the river, we'll get away from 'em yet."

Cham supposed he meant the Otsin River, the broad stream that flowed to the west of the city, so at the first opportunity he turned to the right and sped westward. The others did likewise. As they sped along, they could hear the hue and cry behind them. Two Harling guards, scarlet-clad and armed with sword and pistol, swung suddenly out of an alley in front of them, and from behind came a cry of some sort that roused the guards to action. One whipped out his sword; the other reached for his pistol.

But the fleeing white men were on them before the pistol was out.

"Get him, quick!" cried the smaller of the mercenaries. "If he gets that pistol out—"

His sword swung up, a vicious, underhand cut, and at the same moment Cham's sword came down. The Harling parried Cham's cut by suddenly forgetting his pistol and whipping out his sword, but it was beyond human power to parry both blows at once, and he went down with Chimra's sword in his throat. It was foul fighting, Cham thought regretfully, but it was life or death, and if they were held up until that mob behind caught up with them . . .

The dark mercenary had beaten his opponent against the wall and had worked his way around him. "Go for it, Chimra," he called. "We can't stop to play with this boy now." With a final vicious swipe, he was off, Chimra and Cham following close behind. There was a crash of sound a moment later; Cham felt a bullet whistle



past his ear, and sighed with relief as he realized that the guard's pistol had been emptied without harming them.

The crowd pursuing them had grown larger now, and for the first time it dawned upon Cham that all these Harlings could hardly be expected to assist a pack of thieves to rob a couple of mercenaries. Indeed, even the guards had joined the opposition. Had he gotten himself mixed up in some intrigue far deeper than mere robbery?

THERE was little time to think of that now, though. They were approaching the banks of the river and the Harlings were not far behind. Cham felt a moment of doubt, and then, *splash*, he was in the waters of the Otsin, and two more splashes indicated that his companions had followed him.

"Downstream!" he heard the voice of the tall one whisper. "Underwater and swim downstream. We'll make it faster that way. It's dark and they won't be able to see us. And get farther out in the river."

The advice was wise, and they heeded it at once. When they were forced to come up for air, far out and some distance down, they were quite invisible to their pursuers. They swam and floated silently for some little time, until Cham, chilled by the evening cool, suggested returning to shore.

"Surely," he said, "they have abandoned the search or lost us by this time."

But, strangely enough, the two mercenaries insisted on continuing down the stream, and Cham's suspicions of them rose again. Had he done the right thing, after all, in aiding them against the Harlings?

A log came floating by and all three seized upon it, resting as it carried them along. Presently the little fellow spoke.

"Did you notice who that Harling was, Hanok? The little one who set them on us?"

Hanok, the tall one, shook his head. "I didn't have time to notice anything. Who was he?"

His name was Buka. He was that same Buka that came to Fidefya last year with the retinue of Bos Bakenzi, the ambassa-

dor. He's probably seen you and me a dozen times. He was wise to us in a minute."

Hanok whistled and then looked at Cham and touched a water-shrunk finger to his lips.

"Better not talk too freely yet, Chimra," he cautioned. "I think our friend here is all right, but I wouldn't say any more until we've sounded him out a bit."

He grinned disengagingly at Cham as he spoke, but Chimra nodded. In silence they floated on down the waters of the Otsin.

By this time they had floated several miles and were approaching the boundaries of the High City. Cham had begun to realize when he first saw the ruins in the distance why it was called the High City, but closer proximity made him gasp at the towering immensity of it.

For stark and black against the velvety background of the starry sky, the ancient towers rose to the eyes of the hillman; it seemed that his very hills would have been dwarfed into insignificance by them. Here and there, their gaunt ribs of steel, of rust-scaled, perishing steel, were covered by patches of masonry that for some reason or another still clung to the sides and managed to give the buildings a curious look of leprous decay.

It was cold way up there, Cham thought, and let his gaze wander down to the base of the buildings, where the light of the modern city illuminated the ruins dully. Some ten or twelve stories from the ground his eye was attracted by a scattered group of twinkling and flickering lights, and for a moment he was puzzled. Then it dawned on him that these were the forges of the steel-reclaimers, those metal workers who toiled precariously in the upper ruins, tearing down the last remnants of what the wiser men of old had built.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BENEATH THE CITY

THE log had grounded. Cham felt his feet touch the mud-covered shore and lowered his gaze to look about him. This

spit of sand and mud, jutting out into the river, had once been a pier, but the hillman knew nothing of that. All he knew was that he was once more on land. He struggled to the shore and set off toward the higher land, followed by the two mercenaries.

He made no attempt to conceal himself, and so found himself suddenly with one of his two friends seizing an arm on either side while they hurried him to the shelter of an ancient concrete wall that ran along, some twenty feet from the shore, offering some concealment. Buttresses jutted out at intervals, and in the shelter of one of these the two mercenaries sat down, pulling Cham down beside them. Hanok spoke at once.

"Now look here, my bold hillman, there's got to be an understanding between us before we part. If you haven't begun to get suspicious of us yet, you're simpler than I thought. And if your suspicions are all they should be—why, it would be mighty dangerous to let you go without coming to some sort of understanding."

"I'm suspicious of you, certainly," Cham answered. "The whole town of Harlings didn't attack you just for fun, or to aid a band of Harling thieves. But blast me if I know just what to suspect you of."

Hanok scratched his head and looked quizzically at the hillman. "I'm cursed if I know why I should want to confide in you," he said. "Maybe it's because of the way you helped us out at the tavern, but, well—Look here, suppose you start it off. Tell us what you can of yourself."

Nothing loath, indeed proud that these soldiers were about to take him into their confidence, Cham started off to give them an extended history of his life. He told of his youth in the hills of Dronadac, of his harsh, vixenish mother, his stern but just father, and of those laughing, keen-eyed uncles who had trained him in the ways of a soldier. He told of the sword play they had taught him, of the marches and long trips without food which they had taken to harden him, of swimming in Lake Saroon and the climbing in the hills.

And he told of the day, not long ago, when they had approved of him and ad-

vised him to go and take service in the army of King Hendrik of Niarc.

"But why King Hendrik?" interposed Chimra. "I thought you told us your uncles were soldiers of Behostun."

"My uncles are mercenaries, though they have fought for Behostun many years. But they suggested Hendrik because Saroon is in Hendrik's land, and Niarc is nearest to there. Besides, if war comes between Niarc and Fidefya, as many think, Hendrik will be needing men."

Hanok chuckled.

"You've never taken an oath of allegiance then? You are a free man?"

"Yes."

The two mercenaries breathed sighs of relief and looked at each other significantly.

"Look here, Cham," Hanok said seriously. "Any soldier who amounts to anything these days is a mercenary—one who hires himself out to the highest bidder. Your regular soldier works for a salary, but the mercenary not only gets paid better but reserves the right of pillage."

"And when the battle's over," Chimra put in, "who gets the credit? The mercenaries, that's who. Who captured Tarentum for King-Timatso of Fidefya? And who overthrew the men of Kinettika in Hendrik's father's day? For that matter, who put down the rebellion against Hendrik, in Bru-Kaleen, a few years ago? The mercenaries, of course. There's no money in being a homeguard, Cham, my boy. Be a mercenary and sell your sword to the lord who wants it bad enough to pay for it."

Cham looked more than half convinced.

"It sounds likely enough," he admitted. "But I'm here in the city, and Hendrik of Niarc is here in the city. To whom else could I offer my services?"

Hanok hesitated, and then seemed to make a sudden decision.

"I'll tell you, Cham. And I'm trusting you too much in telling you. But, by the wizards of old, I believe that help you gave us was an omen; and in a way I believe you've been sent to help us. Offer your services to our lord, Cham, to him who will some day be master of Niarc as well as of

his own city. In short, to Timatso, King of Fidefya!"

Cham started in surprise, and then slapped his thigh.

"Blast me, I might have known you weren't Niarcans! That explains everything!"

Chimra leaped up and clapped a hand over Cham's mouth, looking about anxiously.

"Yes, we're spies," he agreed softly. "And you see what a confidence we've placed in you. You might as well know the whole story now. Perhaps then you'll ally yourself with our cause, as you've allied yourself with us.

"You see, for years Timatso has been preparing to attack Niarc. The indolence and sheer indifference of Hendrik to the good of his people has so disgusted Timatso that I've actually seen him rage over each proof of it.

The attack would have been begun months ago, but some Niarcian *ophzars*, while hunting in the marshes of Sharsee, discovered young Kolap, Timatso's son, engaged in the same pursuit. Capturing him by a clever ruse, they brought him here, where Hendrik has since held him as a hostage."

"And of course—" Chimra took up the story—"of course, it was impossible to attempt an attack on Kolap here. So Timatso sent us, two officers of his guard, to rescue Kolap and bring him home again."

"And we, seasoned strategists that we are, proceed to let ourselves be discovered before we have ever so much as seen our prince," Hanok said disgustedly. For a while they sat in silence, Cham because he had nothing to say, the Fidefyans, apparently, because they were too angry with themselves to speak.

"Well, no use throwing your dirk after a broken sword," said Cham. "Let's find a place to sleep and maybe we'll think of something in the morning."

"If we sleep, it'll be in an alley or a hall somewhere," said Hanok grimly. "If Buka's hue and cry has carried, every streetguard and innkeeper in Niarc will be looking for us."

So they climbed the embankment and started cautiously into the city. They walked up the first street they came to, then darted down an alley. A little way down the alley was a wooden fence, and beside it a huge sycamore grew, casting a deep shadow that effectively concealed the ground beneath it. They paused here and removed their clothes, still dripping from the river. They debated for a while the necessity of posting one for a guard, but fatigue arguing heavily against it, all three at last fell asleep in the shelter of the great tree.

DAWN had hardly broken when Cham was awakened by a sharp, quickly stifled exclamation of surprise from Hanok, followed by a round of muttered oaths. He saw the hawk-nosed Fidefyan peering through a knot-hole in the wooden fence beside which they had slept.

When Hanok saw that Cham had awakened he gestured silently for the hillman to come and look through the hole.

Cham looked and as he did so, Hanok whispered angrily in his ear, "Look where we are! Of all the places for a forlorn bunch of fools to sleep! It's a squad range, and we decide to sleep snuggled up against it as calm as a babe in its mother's arms. Good Lord, is that an omen? Chimra! Wake up, you fool!"

Beyond the wall, Cham saw a yard of burnt brick paving, a yard that stretched for ten yards or so to a high wall of the same brick. In front of this wall the brick paving was covered with sand to the depth of several inches, yellow sand which was stained here and there with odd dark stains. The brick wall above was pitted with small holes. Suddenly Cham knew what a squad range was. A *firing squad range*—the place where military executions were carried out.

Hanok was shaking Chimra fiercely. The little blond man opened his eyes at last. He would have closed them again had not Hanok whispered something in his ear, some explanation that set him upright, wide awake in an instant.

They would probably have stolen away at once, but just then a door opened in

the building to the right, beyond the fence. All three clapped their eyes to the crack in the fence to see what was about to take place. Their hands went instinctively to their belts, for they were by no means certain that they had not been discovered.

It became obvious immediately, however, that it was not their discovery that brought the group out of the house, but the more usual event that took place here.

There were six men on the other side of the fence, one of them certainly an *ophzar*, another just as certainly a prisoner. The prisoner was not a large man, but his immense breadth of shoulder and round pot belly made him seem so, and the impression of huge size and dignity were accentuated by great shaggy black brows and a beard that, black as night, poured down upon his chest. He was naked to the waist, exposing a chest so hairy that it was almost impossible to tell where his beard left off and the hair of his chest began; and his only article of clothing was a pair of long loose trousers gathered at the foot like the trousers worn by the Turks of old.

The other four were common soldiers and their purpose here was plain. This was to be a military execution, and they were not left long in doubt as to the reason for it. The *ophzar* took a paper out of his pocket and began to read:

"Order of execution for the self-confessed wizard, known as Borduzai," he began, apparently addressing himself to the prisoner, and then, without pausing again for breath, he gabbled through the entire order. He finished, and shoved the paper into his belt.

"Look here, Borduzai," he said, "you admit you're a wizard, don't you?"

The prisoner nodded a trifle wearily.

"Then what's the idea of letting yourself die like this?" the *ophzar* went on. "You've admitted to me that you know of the secret underground ways of the ancients. And everybody knows that the ancient ones buried their treasures in those ancient ways. You must have access to treasure worth millions. Just by giving me a little of it, you might win your freedom. Why must you be so stubborn?"

The prisoner sighed deeply, then answered.

"If the time ever comes, Obreyan, when you acquire the sense intended for a medium smart goose, you'll know that we wizards, as you call us, are not wielders of magic and evil, but merely seekers after the lost wisdom of our ancestors. I know of no such treasure as you speak of, though I shall admit I know of the underground ways. But many know of them."

The *ophzar* gave a snort of anger. "I've given you your chance, Borduzai. If you don't want to give in, all I can do is obey my orders." He turned to the four and called them to attention.

And then Hanok was whispering suddenly in Cham's ear. Chimra leaned forward to hear.

"Listen to that! This fellow knows the secret of Niarc's underground ways. What a spot for a hide-out! We've got to rescue him and persuade him to take us there. Come on!"

CHIMRA protested wildly as Hanok leaped up to climb the fence, but the prospect of adventure was too much for Cham. So all three were over the fence and rushing across the brick pavement before the soldiers by the wall had finished loading the guns. It was fortunate for the three adventurers that they were so speedy, for if those guns had been loaded . . .

Hanok sped for Obreyan, the *ophzar*. Chimra and Cham swept down on the four soldiers, shouting wildly to startle them. The wizard, dazed at the turn of events, backed away, apparently wondering what under the sun had happened to delay his impending annihilation. But Obreyan, strangely, seemed suddenly stricken with cowardice.

"Into the barracks, men!" he cried. "Don't try to fight. These are demons that he has called up! Shades of our wizard ancestors. Get away, men, quick!"

Cham thought he caught a false note in the panic-stricken cry, but the men dropped their guns and bullets and fled wildly through the door, followed by Obreyan.

"Quick, wizard, it's a rescue!" shouted Cham, and seizing the big man by the

left arm, he swept him toward the wall. The spies followed, but Hanok paused long enough to pick up the bullets lying on the ground.

"They're silver," he explained laughingly, as he caught up with Cham and seized the wizard's other arm. "You can't kill a wizard except with a silver bullet, you know. And I've fought harder fights than this, many a time, for less silver."

They reached the fence, scrambled over it, and sped down the alley. "To your underground ways, wizard," barked Hanok, "and as quickly as possible. We didn't rescue you for nothing. You're a marked man now, and, more than likely, we are too."

They reached the end of the alley, and, still seeing no signs of pursuit, they stopped for a moment to peer out into the street. The coast was clear. They emerged into the street and at a gesture from Borduzai, set off toward the centre of town. Presently the wizard turned a corner, started down another street. Like all the streets which ran the length of the island, it wound its way up and down over innumerable hillocks, which were the piled blocks of stone once used in facing the ancient buildings. The piles had filled with silt and sand during the centuries and now presented the appearance of small, rounded hills, covered with grass and weeds, with only occasionally a bit of eroded stone projecting from them.

At last Borduzai stopped, where two great stones stood up out of a hillock far bigger than any of the others they had seen.

"Now," he said mysteriously. "If you do not fear the spirits of our dead ancestors, enter here with me."

Cham shuddered and looked at his two companions questioningly. But Hanok answered briskly, "We're from Fidefya, wizard. And in Fidefya, we neither slaughter wizards nor worry too much about their claims of magic. We know them for what they are."

Borduzai made no answer as he worked his huge form between the two stones, but there was a twinkle in his eye, and Cham felt that, wizard or not, there was also

gratitude in his heart. So he followed the two Fidefyans as they wended their way into the narrow cavern that wound down from the crevice between the stones.

Borduzai stopped suddenly. Cham could barely see him in the semi-dark. Then Borduzai picked something up from it and turned about.

"It's as black as a pirate's heart down here," he announced. "Don't be afraid of this light. It's one of the secrets of our ancestors that we wizards have rediscovered."

As he spoke, a beam of brilliant yellow light burst from the object he held in his hand, casting a sparkling spot on the wall and filling the cavern with a harsh glow. Cham blinked and, in spite of the wizard's preliminary caution, he backed away. But the Fidefyans were not impressed.

"We have some of those lights in Fidefya," Chimra told Cham. "The wizards there make 'em and sell 'em to the wealthier lords. They're called *lekrik* lights."

The wizard was leading the way deeper into the cavern now. The narrow crack opened suddenly into a great round tunnel, a tunnel obviously made by the hand of man, for the upper half was perfectly circular and the lower half was cut sharply level, while on each side a ledge ran, wide enough to walk on with safety. It was onto one of these ledges that the narrow crack through which they had come emerged, and along this ledge the black-bearded wizard continued to lead them.

**T**HIS is but one of the underground ways," Borduzai announced presently. "It is said that our ancestors had cars driven by strange powers, that carried them instantly from place to place through these ways. There are several that run up and down the length of the city; there are some whose outlets have been found in Bru-Kaleen; one goes to Sharsee; and one, the greatest of all, even goes from Bru-Kaleen to Sharsee. There are lesser ways, called *suers*, that were not used for travel, and we modern wizards and our fathers have, through prodigious labors, connected many of them with the great tunnels, and

so can travel underground from place to place throughout the island."

"It'll be a safe enough place to hide," said Chimra, and then went on dubiously, "But I'd hate to spend much time here, Lord, it's a dismal place."

"You will not have to stay here if you do not wish, Fidefyans. The great cavern of Ho-Lan emerges in Sharsee, as I said, and if you wish, I can lead you to it, and through it to the other side of the Otsin. It's a foul journey, but once in Sharsee we can soon find our way to Timatso's realm."

Hanok overruled the idea at once.

"Nothing doing," he barked emphatically. "Now that we have a place of comparative safety, we're going to try to think up some way of finishing the job we were sent here to do. Chimra, could you go back to the king with a message of failure?"

"Not I," swore the smaller man. "If there's a way to rescue the prince, Kolap, I'll be with you to the death, Hanok."

Cham might have said something in this vein too, but just then Borduzai gave a cry and pointed up the corridor. Simultaneously a voice broke out from the direction in which the wizard pointed.

"There they are! The magician and his companions! Get them!"

Borduzai whirled around and flashed his light in the direction from which the cry had come. Over a dozen men were swarming down the tunnel, armed with swords and waving torches. Some were on the ledge, but more had leaped right down into the slippery mud of the lower level. And in the lead was that *ophzar*, Obreyan, who had used when the three adventurers had rescued the wizard.

A thought came to Cham. "I knew he was faking that fear," he snapped. "He let Borduzai escape, so that he could follow him down here. He still thinks there's treasure in these caverns."

"It's a common enough superstition," said Borduzai. "But we must get away from them. Come on! We'll give them a merry chase through these passages and ways."

Cham and Hanok might have lingered had there been a few less of the enemy, but a dozen or more were just a little too

many for even these fearless ones, and so they turned and followed Borduzai and the already fleeing Chimra.

Down through the huge tube they sped, the bawling, cursing mob almost at their heels. Had Borduzai not been thoroughly familiar with the way, they might soon have been captured, but he ran along straight into the dark, holding the flashlight back so that the other three could see where they trod, and thus they were able to make considerable time.

They had traversed almost half a mile without a sign of any side passage, and Cham was beginning to wonder just how far they would have to go, when Borduzai stopped and motioned them into a crevice that opened in the wall of the great tube.

"In here, quickly!" he exclaimed. "This is one of the tunnels that we wizards have dug to connect the great ways. It leads into the *suers*, and if we can once find our way into that warren of caverns, no man on earth can find us."

Cham and the Fidefyans darted in, Borduzai behind them, and at once the wizard extinguished his light.

"Let me take the lead," he ordered. "And one of you hold on to me and the others. We'll soon lose them in here."

They hurried on, but almost immediately they saw the glare of the torches of their pursuers behind them, and heard their shouts as they again sighted their quarry.

Borduzai swore. "The thought of treasure is a strong incentive," he panted. "Any other time, those fools wouldn't enter these caves to save their mothers' lives."

He turned a corner, entered another, narrower tunnel.

"Maybe we can elude them in here," he snorted. "It's an old hole, very little used, and I don't know it any too well, but we're safer here, for there are a hundred different passages, all twisting and turning—"

They hurried on for a while and then, looking back, they saw that the light from the torches were quite invisible. They slackened their pace to a walk then, and continued on at that speed for some time.

"I think we've gotten rid of them," Bor-

duzai whispered finally. "I'm going to risk a light."

He flashed on his light-making machine as he spoke, and his three companions looked about them. The tunnel which they were in was a low one, lined with blocks of limestone. The moisture seeping through the walls and gathering in puddles on the floor made Cham think that the river was not far away, perhaps even above them. Borduzai was looking worried.

"This is not just where I expected to be," he said hesitantly. "I must have taken a wrong turn. But never mind. I'll soon find a familiar spot. Come on!"

He started off again and Cham and his friends followed him uncertainly. It was not in their plans that the wizard lose his way in what might be called his very own domain, and they were beginning to feel decidedly uneasy. But now there was nothing else to do, and so they followed him.

ON they went until, far ahead in the tunnel, a faint light was visible. Borduzai extinguished his own light to study their glow more plainly and then turned to them with a pleased ejaculation.

"That must be a light from above," he chuckled. "I knew I'd find a way out. Come along, boys, we're safe now."

He started off, but Cham seized him suddenly, and pointed behind him. Around the corner a torch-bearer had appeared and, spying the group instantly, silhouetted as they were against the light ahead, had let out a cry and started toward them.

Borduzai looked and almost spat his anger.

"The mob!" he snapped out. "Is there no losing them? How in thunder could they have traced us through that warren? Quick, let's get out in the open."

They sped toward the light, came to the entrance of the tunnel, raced through—and stopped in amazement. They were not in the open at all, but in a great tunnel, bigger by far than any Cham had yet seen, and gathered in that tunnel were a group of thirty or forty men, clad in a more amazing fashion than any of which the hillman had ever dreamed.

Each of the men had his head shaven and wore a headdress of metal spikes that stood out like a crown. Their heads were painted a brilliant red, their bodies a pure white, and their legs a blue. The kirtles they wore were blue, too, and were sprinkled with stars, and each had a golden-colored belt with a long sword hanging in a golden scabbard.

They had been engaged in some mystic ritual, apparently, for they were gathered in a ring when the four burst in upon them, a ring around a big fire which provided the light that had fooled the adventurers. But no sooner had the four emerged from the tunnel than the entire group whirled and, after standing transfixed for the barest second, rushed toward them, their swords flashing from the gilded scabbards as they came.

Cham felt certain, at once, that their case was indeed hopeless now. With this mad group of fanatics in front, and Obreyan's men in the rear, they were opposed by at least fifty enemies. But he gave not a thought to surrender. Nor did the others. They whipped out their swords and charged upon the strange crowd, hoping against hope that they might fight their way through them and perhaps find safety in flight in the darkness of the huge tunnel beyond the fire.

Instantly the place was a bedlam, a pandemonium. The weird ones hurled themselves upon the four with an absolute disregard of life. Cham slashed at one who had leaped upon him without even attempting to draw his sword, jerked his weapon from the falling man's body, and in the very motion of jerking it upward,

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caught another a vicious blow in the bowels, as the second leaped eagerly over his fallen companion! Even before he had finished this second one, he was forced to pound violently with his free left hand in the face of a third, who had managed to get by Borduzai on the hillman's left.

Hanok had drawn his pistol, and the air of the place was suddenly shattered as he fired it directly into the face of one of the weird ones. The crash had one effect, at least, beside that of ending the life of Hanok's opponent. Silence reigned for a moment after, and in the silence, the voice of Borduzai roared out, "Do not be taken alive! These be the infernal priests of the Goddess Libadi! Better far we should be taken by Obreyan's mob—"

His voice was muffled as he went down under a very avalanche of priests, and again the howling of the priests shattered the air of the great tube. Cham soon found, as did his friends, that to talk of dying rather than be taken alive was one thing, but to do so was another. For a sword can kill but one man at a time, and when a dozen wiry, demoniac creatures hurl themselves suddenly at you, utterly unmindful of death, there isn't much chance of a clean death on a sword's edge.

And so, in a few minutes, Cham and his three friends were flat on their backs, with the red, white and blue demons holding them down, Ropes which had been procured from some mysterious place were being wrapped around and around them until it was lucky they could breathe, much less move.

Throughout the short fight, Cham had seen nothing of Obreyan and his mob, but as soon as the fight was over, and the four were lying, neatly trussed, on the floor, he heard the voice of the *ophzar* bawling, "Hold! Unhand me! In the name of King Hendrik's law, I'm an *ophzar* of Hendrik's army, damn it! Let me go, I say!"

Cham twisted his head around, and saw the disgruntled *ophzar*, raising himself from the midst of a crowd of priests. Several of his companions had also been beaten down by the strangely painted men, and these were now allowed to rise, while several more, trying to look as uncon-

cerned as possible, stepped out from the tunnel into which they had fled when the fighting began.

"This is a most high-handed attack," began Obreyan. "These four men are my prisoners. I thank you for capturing them for me, but just what was your intention in attacking my men, too?"

One of the weird men stepped out from the group, one who was evidently the man in authority among them.

"I am afraid, *ophzar*," he said in a surprisingly cultured voice, "that your prisoners, as you call them, have left your jurisdiction. I am the *prezdun* of the Sons of Libadi, and this cavern you are in is sacred to that goddess. We have a writ given us by Hendrik, giving us jurisdiction over all found in these caverns."

"But these men are criminals," protested Obreyan. "One of them is already condemned as a wizard. They must be returned—"

"They are mine!" snapped the head of the Sons of Libadi. "If they are criminals, as you say, fear not but that they shall be fittingly punished for their crimes. But they are mine!"

O BREYAN protested vehemently, argued volubly, but the priest remained calm and refused to give in. Obreyan went from demands to threats. At last the priest suggested that they leave the decision to the King of Niar, himself. Obreyan was somewhat taken aback by the idea of taking the question to so high a source, but, being one of Hendrik's men, he could hardly refuse. So it was agreed that the high priest should lead them by a short route to the surface, and that the prisoners should be brought before Hendrik at the first opportunity.

The wizard, Cham, and the two Fidefyans were accordingly whipped to their feet and herded down the great tunnel. In a surprisingly short time they found themselves emerging onto the surface again, among a moss-covered group of ruins such as were so common in various parts of the city. Borduzai was surprised to find the location of the place where they emerged, but the others evidently con-



sidered the queer priests capable of anything, and so showed no surprise, nor indeed felt any.

On the surface Obreyan took charge of the prisoners, apparently by tacit consent of the priests. The group had dwindled now; many of the priests had remained behind in the underground way; and, once in the open air, Obreyan's mob of treasure seekers dissolved like mist on a summer morning.

By the time they reached the vicinity of Hendrik's palace, Obreyan, the high priest and four other priests were all that remained of the fifty-odd men who had captured the four in the tunnel.

But it still might have been the fifty, as far as the adventurers were concerned, for the priests of Libadi had not been sparing with their rope. Their arms were bound tightly to their sides, and their legs were hobbled so closely that they found it necessary to take two short steps to every one of their captors'. There were four simultaneous sighs of relief when at last they stood before the entrance to King Hendrik's palace.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE "DRINKER"

THE palace of the king of Niarc did not lie among the great ruins as did the homes of so many of his subjects. For some reason, unknown to the modern men, the wizards of old had left a great open space in the center of the island that was Niarc, a spot where their great sky-piercing towers never raised their heads. Here the modern, barbaric world had done its best to produce a city worthy to succeed the mighty works of an older, wiser day.

That the stones, the window glass and the metal that went to make up the modern city were all filched from the ruins meant little to the present-day builders; they looked upon the ruins much as we look upon iron mines and spruce forests—as things placed there for their benefit.

But it would not be right to think of Hendrik's palace as a haphazard patch-

work. The architects had done their work well; and Cham, whose experience with modern buildings was limited to the brick and wood structures of his home village in the hills, stared in amazement as he was led through long halls and up wide stairways to the court of the king.

They entered the court-room, a long, high-ceiling hall, and were immediately surrounded by curious, questioning courtiers. Presently a scribe approached, asked a number of questions and left them, going in the direction of the other end of the hall.

Cham's eyes followed him and saw a high desk with a group of lower desks around it. The throne room had been furnished to follow, as closely as possible, the style of the courts of justice of the ancients.

Presently a great giant of a man, richly clad and crowned with a gold-cruled cap, came out of a door behind the high desk and took his seat at it. He was an affected sort of a man, a man who shed a strange air of effeminacy in spite of his bulk, and his crown was set at a very precise angle on a mass of blond curls that had very obviously been curled with extreme care and taste. His robes were works of art, and as he seated himself at the bench, he draped himself over it with an air of studied carelessness and indolence.

At once silence fell upon the gabbling groups and all eyes turned toward him. An officious-looking steward came and led Cham's group to the foot of the desk. Obreyan saluted and stood at attention, eyes rigidly forward.

"At ease!" drawled the voice of the big king. He glanced at a script before him and went on in the same indolent tones:

"This is a case of three men accused of encompassing the escape of a condemned wizard. M-mm, pretty serious. Also a matter of disputed jurisdiction." He glanced at the writ again.

"Let's see. Ophzar Obreyan and a priest of the goddess Libadi, named Alcarr, in dispute. Are you Obreyan?" he asked, turning to the *ophzar*.

"Yes, *ironor*." Obreyan's voice was low; it was obvious that he was stricken with awe at being in the presence of such a mighty being as the lord of Niarc.

"And you," Hendrik turned. "Are you Alcarr, the priest?"

"Aye," No awe in that tone. The priest's voice was characteristically arrogant.

"Well, let's hear the argument." Hendrik nodded to the priest, who began his tale of the capture of the four. When it was finished, Hendrik turned to Obreyan, and that worthy, hampered by the necessity of distorting the facts to conceal his attempts to discover the supposed treasure, stumbled through what was a miserable fiasco, as far as stating his own case went.

The king, who had listened half-heartedly up to now, gave an order to one of the scribes, who disappeared. After a long wait he came back with—Buka, the Harling!

Hanok let out a string of resounding oaths, and, turning to Chimra, muttered, "I guess this is the end of our journey, comrade," he said. "Small chance of getting out of this trap, eh?"

The little man nodded glumly. Then he nudged Hanok with his foot, and, with every sign of excitement, attempted to point out something in the crowd of courtiers gathered in the back of the room.

"Look at him, Hanok," he whispered, excitedly. "The young one in the purple shirt. See, there! It's young Captain Kendi, who was with Prince Kolap when he was captured. What in the world is a man of his low rank doing among Hendrik's courtiers?"

Hanok looked and saw the one referred to, and was at once as excited and puzzled as Chimra. Cham, of course, wondered at their excitement, but being at a loss to account for it, allowed his attention to return to the king. The king was speaking:

"These three who helped the wizard to escape are now accused of being Fidefyan spies. I think it would be most foolhardy of my good friend, Timatso of Fidefya, to send spies into my domain while his son is here on a visit. But perhaps Kolap himself will tell me if these men are from his father." He turned to the crowd of courtiers and called, "Kolap, will you come forward?"

Hanok and Chimra looked eagerly into the group of courtiers gathered around the

bench, and Cham, too, turned to see the famous hostage.

And there stepped forward the one whom Chimra had named as Kendi!

KING HENDRIK apparently was quite unaware that there was anything strange about this. Whether this man was Kolap, prince of Fidefya, or Kendi, captain of the Fidefyan army, Hendrik himself apparently had no doubts that it was the prince.

"Lord Kolap," he said smoothly, "these men have been arrested attempting to rescue a condemned wizard. It has been claimed that they are Fidefyans, and, worse still, spies. Now, knowing your virtue and your love of truth—" the king's voice dripped with sarcasm—"knowing that, I am going to ask you have you ever seen these men at your father's court? If not, I may sentence them with a free heart, knowing that the report that they are your father's men is false."

Kendi's eyes looked over the group without a sign of recognition. "I never saw them before in my life, *irronor*," he stated. "They're certainly not Fidefyans, as far as I know."

Hanok and Chimra winced as if from a shock that was almost too much for them. Then Hanok leaned over and whispered something to his smaller companion, and their faces cleared. Hendrik cleared his throat.

"I cannot doubt that you have told the truth," he announced to the mysterious one, and in his tone there was no doubt but that he did doubt him. Nevertheless, he went on: "There being no further need to suspend sentence, I assign these men to Alcarr, priest of Libadi, under whose jurisdiction they were captured, to dispose of them as he sees fit. Court's adjourned."

He raised himself out of his chair and clumped down the several steps to the floor. As he joined the courtiers and a buzz of conversation again filled the room, Cham became aware that a group of priests, a little more fully clad than those he had seen in the tunnel, had entered the room and were preparing to lead him and his friends away.

"What'll they do to us, do you suppose?" he asked Borduzai, as they wended their way out of the palace.

"That's easy to answer," grunted the wizard. "These Libadi worshippers, it is pretty well known, offer human sacrifices to their goddess. Hendrik probably knows that, for he certainly wouldn't have turned a wizard and three spies over to Alcarr, had he expected them to be allowed to live."

Cham turned to Hanok.

"Your prince denied knowing you," he said. "What was his reason? The way Hendrik talked, he might have saved you if he had admitted you were Fidefyans."

Hanok snorted scornfully.

"Don't show your ignorance, hillman," he said. "Had the prince, as you call him, admitted that we were Fidefyans, we would not have died until Hendrik had extracted every bit of information his torturers could squeeze out of us. As it is—well, sacrifice will probably be a quick death, at least."

"But what I can't understand," spoke up the puzzled voice of Chimra, "is the fact that it wasn't our prince. I know Kendi, and Kendi knows me. And I know Prince Kolap. Kolap was not among those present in the court today!"

While they talked and tried to solve this mystery, they were being led through the winding streets of the new city, through the ruins of the west, and at last to the banks of the Otsin. Here they were driven into a boat, a long, ten-oared cutter which was rowed out into the stream and down past the High City and into the bay. And presently, looming up out of the mists to the south, Cham saw the legendary and monstrous idol that was the goddess, Libadi.

It was the great statue of a woman, mottled green and black with age, and it leaned a little toward the city over which it had watched for a thousand years. Its head was crowned with a crown of spikes. Cham remembered the crowns that the priests had worn and realized that they had imitated this crown of the goddess. In one arm she held a tablet; the other was raised aloft, but some accident in the past, some

explosion or similar disruption, had completely destroyed the hand and whatever that hand had once held. Yet, in spite of this mutilation, and the obvious dirt and filth, the statue was so majestic and imposing that Cham felt a thrill of awe surge through him, a vague wonder if this goddess might not be, really, the deity that her votaries claimed.

THE boat was rowed out into the bay, straight for the island. Cham, whose spirits had been dropping slowly to a new low ever since their sentence, had taken heart once, when Hanok had leaned over and carried on a whispered conversation with Chimra. But the conversation had ended abruptly and apparently nothing had come of it. Now, as the rusting towers of the High City began to merge into the mists of the evening, Cham's shoulders drooped dejectedly and he almost gave way to despair.

Hanok sat up abruptly.

"You treat your captives with small consideration, Alcarr," he said to the priest. "Is there no sense of honor among the Sons of Libadi?"

Alcarr looked at him in surprise.

"That is a strange way for a condemned prisoner to talk. In what way have I treated you wrongfully?"

"We are as good as dead," said Hanok. "We are out on the sea, surrounded by guards. Our throats are choking and we're dying for what may be our last smoke. Yet you keep our hands tied behind our backs, and our feet hobbled. Are you priests such cowards as that, Alcarr?"

The priest looked at him shrewdly.

"You spoke overmuch to your companion a while ago, Fidefyan," he said. "I doubt not but that you have some sort of plot together. But I would not want to be considered a harsh man, I will release the bonds on you and on the hillman behind you. And after you have smoked and rested yourselves, I'll tie you up and let the other two smoke."

He gave orders to that effect, and in a moment or two, Cham was stretching his arms and reaching in his pouch for the tobacco which, after rolling a cigarette, he

handed to Hanok. The two oarsmen on either side of him watched him closely, but he made no overt move of any kind, nor did Hanok, and so after a while, the vigilance of the priests slackened.

And then, suddenly, Hanok acted!

He snatched at the dirk in the belt of the priest seated on his right, and with what seemed almost a single sweep, sliced cleanly the bonds that bound Chimra's hands behind him and buried the knife in the breast of the priest on his left. Chimra, who had evidently been waiting for just such a move from his companion, leaped to his feet. With a mighty shove he sent the priest on his left into the water. Then the two Fidefyans, in perfect unison, leaped to the gunwales of the craft, poised the barest fraction of a second and dived into the water. They sank at once, and Cham knew beyond a doubt that they were swimming rapidly away beneath the waves. Alcarr, stunned for a second by the suddenness of the move, now began to bellow orders.

"After them, Kota," he shrilled. "You too, Filpot. Jaim Roklan, Ardi—all five of you. After them!"

The five priests he had named went into the water at once. Cham realized his chance and hurled himself on the priest at his right. That priest's hands were hampered, due to the fact that he was in the act of drawing his dirk. Cham seized his arm with both hands and with a mighty heave sent him overboard to join his companions. Then the hillman leaped forward, intent on serving the high priest the same way.

Alcarr bowed with terror and leaped to his feet, with the idea of better protecting himself. He could not have played into Cham's hands better had he tried. Cham, crawling over the seats to the bow of the boat, seized the calf of Alcarr's leg and jerked the priest's feet out from under him. Another Son of Libadi struck the water with a splash.

He heard a cry behind him. He turned around. The two remaining priests, who had been rowing behind him in the boat, were coming after him, their dirks waving above their heads. They were so near that it seemed only a miracle could save him

from their knives. And then the huge form of Borduzai, still bound hand and foot, raised up and hurled itself between the priests.

One huge shoulder struck the man on the right, the other the man on the left. Their balance, precarious enough in the boat, was destroyed entirely. One toppled and fell, grasping wildly, into the water. The other dropped into the boat and Cham hurled himself immediately on top of him, his hand seeking the other's dirk. They scuffled for a moment for the weapons, but, as all through the battle, the priest found himself no match for the man trained in the arts of war.

It was the work of but a moment to cut Borduzai's bonds. Then they turned to see how the affair in the water was progressing.

Over two dozen yards away, Hanok and Chimra had appeared again. The priests of Libadi were swimming rapidly toward them, two definitely in the lead of the others. As Cham looked, the two Fidefyans sank again beneath the waves and presently one of the priests screamed and sank. The others thrashed vainly around in the waters, apparently fearful of being dragged under. And then, behind him, Cham heard the familiar voice of Hanok. The spies had swum under water to the boat and come up on the other side of it!

"Help me up, hillman," cried the Fidefyan. "Once in this boat, I defy 'em to capture us again."

Cham and Borduzai leaped to their assistance, and in a moment the four were in command of the cutter. A moment later, a priest's hands appeared on the gunwhale and Hanok, seizing an oar, brought it down sharply on his knuckles. As he did so, another form appeared on the other side of the boat. Cham, following Hanok's method, rapped smartly on the clutching hands, and again heard a howl as the priest's grip on the boat relaxed.

For several minutes the four were busy keeping the priests from hoarding the boat.

Then Hanok bawled, "You'll never get into his boat again, fools. Why don't you give up your attempts and swim for your island while you still have the strength to do it?"

HIS advice was sound, but it was several moments before the Sons of Libadi realized it. Then, disgustedly, one by one, they abandoned their attacks on the boat and struck out for the distant island. And presently the four adventurers were alone.

"And now," said Borduzai. "Let's see if we can't make for Bru-Kaleen. I have friends there who will hide us until we can make plans for our safety."

Accordingly, they turned the boat and rowed for some time to the east. But something seemed to be swinging them toward the north, and presently they found it necessary to pull strongly to the south, in order to avoid moving back to the island of Niarc.

At last, they were forced to admit that four oars were not enough to keep the heavy cutter from tending in the direction in which the current was carrying it.

"It's the tide," said Chimra. "The tide is sweeping in and carrying us with it. Row harder, Cham."

Row harder would have been good advice had they all not been practically at their strength's end already.

And then Borduzai swore in his beard and spat out angrily, "Slay me for a fool, if I haven't forgotten the 'Drinker.'"

"That what?" Three voices barked at the same time.

"The Drinker. So do the men of Niarc name a cavern on the lower end of the island. It lies exactly at the level of the sea, and each time the tide comes in, water pours in a great flood into that cavern, and each time the tide goes out, it pours out again. It is the one tunnel that even the wizards leave alone, for if one should be caught in there when the flood pours in—well, no one would ever know what became of you."

"And we are drifting toward it?"

"Drifting? Nay, we are being sucked into it. See, over there by the shore, that dark space? Aye, it's the Drinker, all right."

Cham saw the place, and saw too that the boat was moving toward it with appalling swiftness. He hauled mightily on his oar, and the others did the same, but

all in vain. It was but a surprising few minutes before they were swept along with the ever-increasing current, into the very mouth of the cavern.

The great black hole yawned wide, the boat swept in, and daylight became a dwindling half-circle shrinking into the distance. Hanok spoke, and his disgusted voice echoed hollowly from the walls of the tunnel.

"If ever four were pursued by an evil fate they sit here now, in this boat. First, the Harlings. Then the priests of Libadi. And now—this. By the wizards of old, we are doomed, as surely as ever a man was."

Borduzai laughed shortly.

"Look at it the other way, my friend. Think of the many deaths from which we have escaped this day. To my mind, whatever gods there are with us."

Cham said nothing. He was busy watching that last small spot of daylight disappear entirely. And then for a while the entire group sat silent, feeling the boat rock and leap as it swept along through the darkness.

"Your light, Borduzai!" snapped Hanok at last. "Let's see what lies about us. If we are to die without a chance to fight for our lives—at least let us see what the manner of our death is to be."

"Much help the light will give us," grunted Borduzai. But nevertheless he flashed on the much-used torch, and in its dwindling beam the four looked about them. There was not much to see. The rushing waters that carried them along, the arching walls and curved ceiling, and ahead and behind them—darkness. But Cham noticed something else, and a faint hope welled up in him.

At intervals, projections not unlike buttresses stood out from the side walls, projections that had evidently been built to strengthen those walls. It seemed to Cham that if one could get a firm grip on one of those projections, it might be possible to hold the boat and end its mad flight. And if that hold could last long enough—What was it Borduzai had said about the water being ejected when the tide went out?

He pondered the matter for some little time and then decided to act. As the boat, pitched and tossed by the tumbling waters, next approached near enough to one of the buttresses, he seized the corner of it in a mighty grip.

But he reckoned without the force of the speed which the boat had attained. His grip held, to be sure, and the boat did stop momentarily; but then his foot slipped and as Hanok gasped hoarsely in surprise and Borduzai and Chimra cried out in alarm, his balance failed him and the boat was jerked violently from under him. His grip gave way, and he fell with a splash into the tumbling waters. He sank, came up sputtering and shaking his head, and instinctively began swimming with the current. He glanced about and saw Borduzai's light, already yards away and dwindling rapidly. Before long he was alone, and the darkness could almost be felt.

The constant excitement, the constant lifting and dropping of his spirits since he had entered the city had made a greater demand on Cham's nerve system than he would have guessed. And now this last disaster, which had robbed him of the friends whose presence had buoyed him up more than he knew, seemed to extract from him his last ounce of courage. Instead of fighting, as was his nature, he relaxed and began to simply tread water, letting the rushing flood carry him where it would.

It carried him along, whirling and eddying, sometimes on one side of the tunnel, sometimes on the other, and always in darkness that could be cut with a knife. Cham had thought he knew the meaning of darkness before, but this inky blackness could almost be felt; it seemed, somehow, close; it hung before his face and seemed to smother it—

His body struck something. One of the projecting buttresses, no doubt. His arms flew up, instinctively, to push him away from the wall. And his arm encountered emptiness! The other arm, which he brought up immediately, touched the wall that should have been there and thrust him back into the stream.

Cham was puzzled. For a moment he

was at a loss to explain why his left arm had encountered emptiness. Then it dawned on him—there had been a ledge, and his left arm, flung out and up so suddenly, had been higher than his right and had touched only the empty air above the ledge, while his right arm had touched the wall below.

If there were a ledge, and if he could get up on it—why there was a chance for him yet. He swam eagerly to the right, his head struck another buttress, but though a thousand stars flashed about him, and his head rang, his arms flung out and in another minute of hard work he rose and sat upon the ledge.

HE sat and panted and dripped for a full five minutes. Until this minute, he had realized what a battle he had been putting up. But now, in what might be called comparative safety, he was forced to admit that he was well-nigh exhausted.

But, once his breath returned and his head cleared, he rose up, resolutely determined to explore the ledge and find, if possible, some way to the surface. He remembered that Borduzai had led him and his friends along just such a ledge as this when they had entered the first tunnel, earlier in the day. This gave him reason to believe that this ledge, like the other one, might have some pathway to above.

So, for what must have been the better part of an hour, he felt his way carefully along the ledge, avoiding or carefully crawling over the occasional broken places or spots that were wet and slippery. And then there was an archway, and a hall that led away from the tunnel, and a flight of steps!

Cham's hopes were beating high now. He was expecting, momentarily, to see light ahead. That he was near the surface he did not doubt. Fortunately for him, he had not Borduzai's knowledge of the many, many exits that had become clogged with the silt of ages and no longer had any opening on the surface at all. So he felt his way along, and presently he was amazed to hear, as though coming from some distance, the faint sound of a human voice.

It was still too far way to make out the words, but it had a scornful imperious tone when he first heard it, a tone that made him imagine the speaker was haughtily refusing some plea or command. It continued in this vein while Cham drew nearer, and then suddenly changed to a hopeless, discouraged sob—then silence.

The silence persisted, and Cham might have passed the speaker by had he not seen the light. It was a dim, dim light, and it shone through the chinks in a wooden door which, obviously built by moderns, walled an ancient archway at Cham's left. Cham stopped at once, and peered through one of the cracks in the door. And as he did so, a deep sigh welled from somewhere beyond that door.

"Who's there?" Cham called sharply, and again: "Hallo, there. Where are you?"

He heard the one within gasp suddenly, and then the silence was deeper than ever, as though the other was holding his breath. "Speak again," the voice said softly after a moment. "Who are you? And—where are you?"

"I'm beyond this wooden door," Cham said. "Never mind who I am, for the present"

There was another gasp from the one beyond the door.

This time it was almost certainly a gasp of fear.

"If—if you are of our wizard ancestors—" the voice began.

"Nonsense!" Cham snapped, thoroughly convinced now that there was no danger in the person to whom he was talking. Indeed, judging from the voice, its owner must be younger than Cham, perhaps a mere boy.

The hillman went on: "I'm no more a spirit than you are. I was caught in that tunnel that Niarcan called the Drinker. I managed to get out of the water and onto a ledge. I found a passage and it led to you. Now tell me about yourself, and how we can get out of here."

"Get out of here!" There was a bitter laugh. "I can tell you many things, my unfortunate friend, but how to get out of here is a problem that more minds than

mine have given up. This dungeon I am in is the torture cell of King Hendrik of Niarcl!"

"And my other question?" queried Cham. "What of yourself and how you came to be here? It is not often that anyone save murderers and madmen are cast into these dungeons; and though I seem to be doomed, I still like to pick my company to some extent."

Dignity filled the voice beyond the door. "Neither murderer nor madman am I, my friend; though if I revealed my identity, you might think me the latter."

"I'm inclined to think it anyway," said Cham bluntly. "Whom were you talking to as I approached?"

To his surprise, he heard a sob from beyond the door.

"PERHAPS I am mad," came the voice after a moment. "But I have been down here alone so long that anything is understandable. Look! For some reason I trust you, my unseen friend. And I am going to tell you something that I have not spoken of since I came to Niarcl. I am not a Niarcan, as you must have already guessed from my dialect. I am Kolap, the son of the King of Fidefya and— Why, what's the matter?"

For Cham had burst out with a cry of astonishment, and followed it with a resounding oath.

"Look here," he cried, excitedly. "I too am a stranger to Niarcl. And in this city, I have but two friends and they, Hanok and Chimra, who claim they are spies from your father's court, come to rescue you!"

"Hanok! Chimra! By the spirit of Penn! If they are searching for me, I am as good as rescued. They are two of my father's bravest and cleverest soldiers. Surely, stranger, that is good news!"

Cham hated to lower the spirits that he had raised so suddenly. "I'm sorry *ironic*," he said. "But when last I saw those two fighters, they and another were being swept to death down the mouth of the Drinker."

"Then—then they're dead?" The voice was hopeless again.

Cham shook his head, forgetful that

darkness and the door between made it impossible for Kolap to see him. "I doubt their deaths," he said. "It was a sturdy boat, and a narrow one. And if ever three bore charmed lives, it was they."

"Three?"

"Aye, there was a wizard with them, another encouraging fact. He knows the caverns and tunnels like one of the spirits of the ancients. And he has many very efficient charms."

The conversation lagged. Cham could think of nothing else to say to encourage the prince, and Kolap was evidently so used to silence that it meant little to him.

"Why don't you come in here?" he asked presently.

Cham started. "What do you mean?" His hand was on the door handle as he spoke. "Isn't this door locked?"

"No." The prince spoke sadly. "Hendrik never let it be locked. He knew I would never leave the cell. I might easily have become lost in the corridors down here, and even if I found the way to the top, I could never escape. I think he thought to frighten me more by allowing the spirits of the ancients to haunt me."

As he spoke, Cham had swung the door open and stepped inside, and in the dim light which filtered in from a grated opening above, he saw the form of the young prince stretched out on a cot in the corner.

"I suppose I might as well tell you," the prince went on. "You see, when I was captured one of my friends, the young Captain Kendi, was with me. Kendi believed that he would be held for some small ransom and soon returned to Fidefya. But we knew that I, because of my rank, would be held as a hostage. So we changed identities, and he became Kolap and I, Kendi."

"We supposed that thus I would soon be ransomed and returned to Fidefya. But Hendrik, with a fool's craftiness, believed that the *ophzar*, Kendi, should have information about the Fidefyan army that could be used if ever war came. Therefore, instead of holding me for ransom, he kept threatening me with death and torture if I didn't betray all that I knew."

Cham snorted.

"He'll never get the chance now," he

scuffed. "You and I will not be here another day. Look! It was told me by the wizard Borduzai that the Drinker sucks water in while the tide rises, but that when the tide falls, the Drinker spews it out again. And I think, when the Drinker spews out its water this day, two men will be washed out with it!"

WITHOUT saying more, the hillman took Kolap by the hand and led him out into the passageway. Through the long hall they felt their way, down the steps, and came at last to the ledge and began to follow it to the left. Cham had no idea how far it might go in that direction, but he knew it was best to get as close to the opening as possible before trusting to the wild waters.

Occasionally he let a hand down into the stream to see if the current still swept inward. Finally he could no longer notice it, and he began to hope that the inward sweep of the waters had ceased. And at last, sure enough, he felt a slight pull in the opposite direction.

Abruptly the ledge ended.

Then he turned to Kolap. "How well can you swim?" he asked.

"Like a Fidefyan," was the proud answer. "Have you never heard that saying, Cham?"

"No, but I hope it is a good one," answered the hillman. "For, if ever you swim, you must do it now."

"Ready," was Kolap's brief answer, and they plunged into the stream.

The water picked them up and carried them away.

For a time nothing was heard or seen at the spot where they had leaped in save the rushing and splashing of the water. As the tide ebbed faster, the waters poured out with greater and greater force, but it was all in darkness until, suddenly, from far upstream, came a glimmer of light.

It turned back for a moment and revealed its source, a battered boat that held three battered men.

"It must have been about here that we lost him," croaked the holder of the light. "I fear that we must give him up, Hanok. We surely would have seen some sign of



him, if there was any hope at all."

Hanok sighed. "I suppose you're right, wizard. And I'm indeed sorry. I had high hopes for that lad."

There was silence again in the boat, for the men had obviously given up their search, although Borduzai continued to scan the water. At last, far ahead, they saw the faint semi-circle of light that meant they were coming to the entrance of the tunnel. It grew and grew, and suddenly they were in the open sea, their eyes blinded by the sudden light. While they blinked and rubbed their eyes, they heard glad cries and felt hands grasp the gunwale of the boat. When they could see again, there were Cham and Kolap, climbing in to the boat and pouring out, in one chattering flood, the story of their adventures.

CHAM, Hanok and Chimra felt as if their arms would break. After all that wild adventure in the dark, it had been necessary to bring the boat all the way around the island and across the bay to

Sharsee. Barduzai and Kolap had helped, but the main portion of the rowing had fallen on the three soldiers and, fatigued as they were, it had told on them seriously.

But at last the shore was drawing near, and Kolap would not conceal his delight.

"Soon we'll be in Sharsee!" he exclaimed. "I can hardly wait to see the marshes again. And once beyond the marshes, a day or two and we'll be in my father's empire. Then we'll see, Master Hendrik, what my father'll do to you!"

He watched the approaching shore a moment. "I think my noble father will reward you richly, Hanok. And you too, Cham, you shall be rewarded too, for it was really you who saved me. You shall be—" He was interrupted by an apologetic cough from Hanok.

"Your pardon, *irronor*," said that worthy. "But I think I had better take charge of Cham's reward. He came down from the hills of Dronadac to be a fighter. And by the wizards of old, I am going to see that his ambition is fulfilled!"

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# RETURN *from* ZERO

By ROSS ROCKLYNNE

"YOU'RE paying me fifty thousand dollars," Ed Carson bitterly told Dr. Emmanuel Debtree, "to kill myself."

"No such thing." The scientist grinned tightly. "I'm paying you to prove yourself worthy of my ward's hand. You're a coward, Carson, and a whiner. Unable to summon the effort to fit into society, you took a job on a radical sheet and wrote editorials slamming so-called capitalists like me. When the paper was sued, the editor fired you and appealed the libelee, which happened to be myself. And if it hadn't been for Bernie, I wouldn't have let you get away that easy—"

Ed Carson broke in coldly. "And if I had the editorial to write over again, I'd say the same thing. You're the coward, not me. You hide behind your automobile millions and make slaves out of working men, and you haven't any conception of what they have to go through. You don't give a hang for the underdog—your whole life has been spent in saving your own skin. If you haven't any respect for me, you can be damn sure I haven't any for you."

Debtree's shrewd, sharp eyes impaled the other man's. His hands worked at the front of his stained smock, buttoning and unbuttoning.

He said dangerously, "You think you're worth being Bernie's husband?"

"Just as much as you're worthy of being her guardian. How she escaped being contaminated with your brand of ethics and general contempt for anything besides yourself, I'll never know. I think it'd be a good idea to take her away while she's still young enough to get the right ideas about life."

Debtree leaned back against the hall table. "Wonderful," he exclaimed. "And starve with you in a flophouse!"

Ed Carson said softly, "No. We'll be living on the fifty thousand dollars you're giving me to make a trip to an atom—if I come back. I'm taking the job."

Debtree gave him one inscrutable look, grinned tightly, and turned without another word. The two men clattered down the basement stairs. At the bottom of the stairs Carson stopped him. His eyes were thoughtful, knowing. Debtree was not old; around thirty, probably.

"You're in love with Bernie yourself, aren't you, Debtree?" he asked.

Debtree's eyes widened the merest trifle. He paled. He said nothing for a long moment. Then, huskily, "Come on, 'I'll give you your first lesson in the operation of the ship.'"

THE laboratory was flooded with light. It was a long laboratory. It had to be, to accommodate the atom-ship. This was a ship that Debtree had been at work on for some years. It was the result of his dream to explore the atom. Theoretically it was possible—this ship was the answer. But was it practical? What unknown principles had been overlooked? What dangers were there in transit? Debtree, for reasons Carson thought he knew, had suggested that Carson find out the answers to those questions.

Carson kept his thin face turned away from the scientist, afraid of what it might reveal. The truth was that he was scared. The ship looked harmless enough. There were three ports on each side of a great, rectangular box. Numerous small rockets blasts fore and aft gave the only true indication that it was a ship.

Debtree swung the door open, teeth clenched in grim amusement. "We'll give you your first lesson now."

There was the sudden, staccato click of

high-heeled shoes on the stairs. Bernie Reigate, all one hundred five pounds of her, came down, her short green skirt billowing up. A wisp of auburn hair fluttered as she swung around the newel post.

"I was looking for you two!" she exclaimed.

She looked at Ed suspiciously; then at Debtree. "Why's the door of the atom-ship open?" she demanded.

Debtree slowly reddened. His lips clamped angrily. "This isn't any of your business, Bernie. Get upstairs. You've protected Carson long enough—"

"Because he needs protection! If only you knew what he's gone through. He's been treated shabbily. And by men like you."

Carson's eyes were miserable.

Debtree sneered. "According to his story he has. This is the end of this business. Either you have a man for a husband—"

"Look who's talking!" She clicked toward him. Her hands clutched his shoulders. Furiously she shook him. "You wouldn't dare! You're trying to kill Ed."

Debtree stood still, angered speechless by her temper, as he always was. He said at last, very softly, "Bernie, sometime when you do that again I'm going to—"

Her eyes filled with tears. "I don't care!" she stormed. "When you love a man you can't stand by and watch him sent to his death." She swung to Carson. "It'll kill you, Ed. You know it will. He hasn't even tested the ship, except down to half-size. What'll happen to you when you get down there among atoms and electrons and things like that?"

Ed turned slowly pale. "I have to do it," he said with difficulty.

She burst into a muffled, angry sob and fled up the stairs.

Debtree watched her go, his face gray. He turned slowly back to Carson. "I'll give you your first lesson," he said.

ONE evening three weeks later, Ed Carson came into the house through the open door. No one had answered the bell.

He clomped downstairs.

Bernie Reigate was sitting on the edge of the workbench stool, her eyes round and innocent.

"Hello, Ed," she greeted him off-handedly. She got up with a lazy shrug and kissed him. When she made a motion to draw away, he brought her to him with sudden fierceness.

Breathlessly she squirmed away. "Whew! You sure take the fits. What brought you over?"

Carson's eyes were sick with dread. "I'm going—down. Where's your guardian?"

She surveyed him critically. "You look as if you need a drink," she decided. She slid off the edge of the stool, and poured him three fingers from an innocent looking bottle. His eyes lighted with relief. He gulped it down.

He stood there, then, singularly awkward, clad in polo coat, scarf, gloves; a tall, hollow-cheeked man with pale skin, sensitive lips. He wanted to tell her before he left how much he loved her, and why he was taking this chance. Not for the money. But because of the wreck he'd made of his life, the desperate necessity for salvation that stirred in him.

Then Bernie had hold of his arm. Her voice came smoothly. She was telling him he shouldn't worry.

He saw her round young face through a fog. She rambled on, talked steadily. Suddenly he pitched forward on his face. Then he felt her dragging him across the room toward the atom-ship.

"Bernie!" he choked. "You didn't—the whisky—"

Suddenly he remembered that she knew how to work the controls of the ship. He wanted to shout his protest. It was too late. He sank into an unconscious stupor. He did not see the walls of the laboratory expand until they were lost from sight; did not see the very floor grow into giant mountains and valleys, the flanks of the mountains expanding away, and more mountains coming into being. He was unaware of the thundering, empty spaces that grew, the ship suspended in nothingness, motes of light darting like fireflies in a frightful, depthless void. . . .

ONE glance when he woke told him that he was inside the atom-ship. There was the air-rectifier, the humidity regulator, the little cook stove in the pantry, the quiet bank of tubes. Also he saw Debtree, sprawled unconscious. At the front of the ship Bernie Reigate was leaning back in the control chair, staring at them as if she were stunned.

Carson said, in a voice that sounded as if he were pronouncing his own doom, "You've made the trip?"

"Yes," She ran a pointed tongue around her dry lips. She lowered her eyes, fighting with herself. "Not only that. I tested the machinery to see if the ship would go back up. It won't work."

Carson said no more. He crawled over and shook Debtree until the scientist groaned and came to his knees. He looked around with a sick, painful glance. His eyes fastened on Bernie. Panic touched his face.

He clawed his way to his feet, and lurched drunkenly toward the controls. Then he stared through a porthole. Carson, watching him, saw his face blanch.

"All right," Debtree lashed out at Bernie, lips contorted. "Why did you do it?"

She came to her feet, standing at a vantage point where she could address her guardian as well as Carson.

"Because I didn't want Ed to go without me, if he insisted on going! And because even though you built the ship—you were afraid to risk trying it out yourself. You'd pay someone to die. I thought we should all be together—but I didn't know the controls would break down!"

Her voice rose in a wail on the last words.

Debtree thrust her a startled, angry glance. He punched buttons on the control board. The reducer machinery hummed. Outside, there was a frosted world. It grew no smaller.

Carson came forward, and with Debtree, leaned over the innards of the controls. He knew the ship, the theory of its operation, almost as well as the scientist. With Debtree, he now began to trace leads, to seek for a possible breakage in the transmission. There was none. The minutes

turned into an hour, two hours, three hours, while they dismantled the reducer machinery. Bernie looked on for most of that time, then she suddenly turned and entered one of the cabins space along the central tunnel.

They worked silently, in sullen, blistering antagonism. Their hatred shone in their eyes.

Then they both straightened at the same time. Debtree's face was pale.

"Machinery's okay," he jerked out. "My theory wasn't. Somewhere along the line I slipped up. Molecules are made up of atoms. Atoms of electrons. Those electrons are worlds in their own right, and made up of more molecules, which are made of atoms, which are made of still smaller electrons. That part's okay. But somewhere I slipped. You can go down. But you can't go up. Why? Good God *why*?"

Bernie was standing in the door of the cabin. She had on more comfortable clothes. She said levelly, "I had stocked the ship up with sheets and blankets. Clothes, too, and some food. I didn't think we'd really need the stuff. It looks as if we do."

Carson looked at her haggardly. "Food?" he asked. "All right, let's eat."

THEY ate in complete silence. There were beans, lean slices of ham. Coffee perked on the electric burner. They avoided each other's eyes, and sat glumly. At a square table under a square, window-size port. Outside was an unknown world, sweeping away to dead, gray horizons. It was electronic in size, hard and frozen, with a thin rime of snow sprinkled like seasoning on the dips and hillocks.

Bernie spoke, her eyes miserable. "Is there anything to test the air outside?"

Debtree reddened and shook his head.

Halfway through the meal, Carson excused himself, and closed the kitchen door behind him. He put on his polo coat, scarf, and heavy gloves. Then he wrapped a towel around his head.

He moved down the tunnel, fumbled at the controls of the closet-size airlocks. The inner doors swung open, and then swung shut behind him. He was enclosed in dark-

ness. He stood there, fighting his battle. He worked the outer door, slowly. The motor whirled.

A plane of cold light fell across Carson's thin face. A sudden, forceful wind blew. There was an unbearable outward pressure inside his lungs as he staggered through the open door, coughing horribly, ears ringing. His body sagged to the snow, doubled up.

He lay there for a minute, convulsed. Then he rose, his shoulders shaking with his sobbing breaths, his face dead white. He began to grin crazily.

He walked a drunken loop around the ship. His brain steadied, new strength flooded into his limbs. He went to the kitchen window and peered through the glass. Bernie screamed in terror. Debtree's fork dropped with a muted clatter as he came to his feet. Carson grinned.

"But it might have killed you!" Bernie cried when he went back into the ship. She was trembling, her face wet; her eyes sparkling with pride.

Debtree studied Carson. "The sacrifice angle," he suggested, thinly veiling his sarcasm. "How'd you know the air was good?"

Bernie whirled on him. Carson stopped her. "I didn't know it was good. How could I?"

"We had enough air to last a week. You needn't have pulled the martyr act so soon."

"We've got enough air now for as long as we want it," Carson said angrily. "But as it is, we haven't enough food for the rest of our lives. I went outside because I had to find out if this was a habitable world. It is habitable, and that means there might be intelligent life here. We're going to look for it."

"Ed!" Bernie exclaimed faintly.

His voice was dogged. "What else will we do? We don't know what's wrong. If we can find a scientific civilization, they may be able to help us fix the machinery so we can go back up."

A pulsing silence settled. Debtree's voice was thin. "Okay. Go out and find 'em. It's your job. You get a bonus of fifty thousand if you get us back."

Two spots of red burned in Bernie's cheeks. She blazed, "If you think that money can get you out of anything you want it to, Deb, you're crazy. If Ed goes, you go too!"

"I'll go alone," Carson said angrily.

"Oh, no you won't!" She looked at Debtree with scathing impact, and said nothing more. He slowly reddened, biting at his lips.

"Okay," he jerked out. "After we get some sleep."

**F**ORTY feet from the ship, Carson turned, and saw Bernie's tear-streaked face at the port. He waved one hand heartedly, then turned with heavy feet to trudge after Debtree. They had compasses, but apparently this electronic world had no magnetic poles. They could get back to the ship by following their footprints in the snow, but only if the weather remained windless.

The ground was approximately even, dipping only now and then. The horizon was shrouded in gray, featureless mist. If there was a sun, they did not see it, though the presence of an intense white light suggested its existence. There was no vegetation, and apparently no animal life. Carson's heart began to sink as they pushed on through the bitter cold. They remained voiceless, silently antagonistic.

Three hours passed. Carson saw Debtree's uneven steps, his jerkily straightened knees. After another hour, Debtree pitched forward, then drew himself to a sitting position. Even through their heavy clothing they both were shivering.

"We'll have to go back," he gasped. His face was marble white with exhaustion and cold.

"You've been thinking that all this time?"

"We won't find anything," Debtree said half hysterically. "We'll keep on walking and walking and we won't find anything. We'll drop. We might as well go back to the ship and die there as out here."

"Bernie'll die too," said Carson.

Debtree's expression underwent a curious change. He stumbled to his feet, weaving. He staggered ahead. After a time

Carson stopped him. He unslung the kit from his shoulder and from various jars shook out crumbs of dehydrated eggs, carrots and beans. Debtree wolfed it down. Carson handed him a square of thick, sweet chocolate.

The country was more hilly now. Carson raised his arm and pointed. He said through stiff lips, "What we're looking for might be beyond that rise."

Debtree stared up at him and sneered. "It pleases you to buck me up, doesn't it?"

Carson compressed his lips. He went ahead. He heard Debtree crunching the thin rind of snow behind him.

NOT beyond the next hill, nor beyond the next; but after another frigid half-hour, Carson's prediction proved unexpectedly precise. Carson stopped, breath drawn through suddenly meeting teeth. A curious drama was taking place on the plain that sloped away.

Debtree came panting up, and followed Carson's pointing arm.

"A man!" Debtree half screamed. But Carson held him back.

"He's being pursued."

Debtree recoiled. The man, if man he was, was coming at full speed, but at such an angle that he did not see the two beings from the macro-universe. On his trail, and slowly gaining, was a pack of creatures spread out in a long line, following their leader. They might have been insects, with rounded black bodies that showed up in startling contrast against the snow. Extending from their heads was a veritable tangle of spider web feelers, perhaps twice as long as the body. The leader had his feelers spread out in a line, touching the ground. Though the creature they were pursuing zigzagged, they followed his footprints by the sense of touch alone. That was quite apparent.

Debtree started to turn. Carson grabbed his arm. "We're going to save him," he said grimly.

"Save him?" Debtree was incredulous. "Don't be a fool. We'll wind up sliced into mincemeat by the clippers they've got slung alongside their bodies."

Carson considered him through nar-

rowed eyes. He said harshly, "Try to think of the underdog for a change, Debtree. Maybe I've remembered them and fought for them too much, but at least I can't be accused of your brand of selfishness—and cowardice."

"You're crazy," Debtree gasped.

Carson's hand lashed out and slapped him fiercely, "You'll do what I say," he snapped. "If you don't want to help him, at least you might remember that he may give us the kind of help we need."

Debtree's heavily wrapped hand crept up to his face.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Give them three horns of a dilemma."

He spoke rapidly, giving Debtree the essentials of the plan. He finished none too soon. The man was a hundred feet distant, and would pass by their hill in mere seconds. Carson immediately started off, leaving Debtree to his own devices. But he heard Debtree running along behind.

Carson didn't have as much faith in the scheme as he had let on, but it was worth a try. As he came nearer the strange column of pursuers and pursued, he cut in at an acute angle across the man's foot-print path. The man saw him, then, and shied away. He kept on running.

The nightmarish beasts gave no sign that they noticed. They were still some twenty feet away. As Carson cut across in front of them, he created a diverging path from the one the beasts were following at such unholy speed.

At last he turned his head, and his pulse gave a single leap. Debtree, who was panting beside him, gave a shout. "Did it!"

The beasts came to a complete standstill. Their leader was at the apex of a bisected angle three pairs of feet had formed. Its feelers brushed over the three paths, feeling them out. The beasts behind remained in line, waiting for their leader to start up again.

"Three horns of a dilemma," Debtree marveled. He grinned tightly. With Carson, he loped toward the man, who had now come to a halt, staring at them. There was astonishment in his manner. It was evident, though, that he was not completely

patterned after humans. The differences consisted of a foot less height, a tight, apparently poreless skin, a box-shaped face inset with extremely mobile and tiny eyes. His nose was so indistinct it merged with the face, and beneath it his lips were triangular. The effect of this was weirdly alien, but not frightening, for the rest of him was vaguely human.

Carson and Debtree stopped in front of him, uncertainly. The creature curled his lips in what was apparently a smile. He spoke with soft questioning intonation. Carson answered back, spreading his hands and shrugging his shoulders. The being frowned. Then he nodded his head as if having come to a sudden decision. He smiled, took one step forward, and placed the tips of his fingers against Carson's temples.

Astonished, Carson stared at him. The creature's eyes were growing in his mind like a thrown baseball. A baseball that was fiery white, shifting with terrible, blazing colors. Carson felt his mind totter. Little fluttering fingers ran along the nerve channels of his brain. The next thing he knew, he was on hands and knees, shaking his head dizzily. Debtree was in a similar position.

"What happened?" Debtree gasped.

The creature was standing with his hands on his hips, his eyes alight with amusement.

"It was necessary, my friends. We couldn't communicate — an uncivilized state of affairs."

"Now," said Carson numbly, "you're talking English."

The man had his attention on the insect-like creatures. The whole line had come a standstill, their leader desperate, unable to pick between one of the three diverging paths. The being's eyes came back.

He said softly, "Of course I'm speaking English. And why not? You hypnotized me."

"We hypnotized *you*," marveled Debtree.

The other held their eyes gravely. Of course. During the hypnosis you gave me a good working knowledge of the language, your individual histories, the rela-

tions between you, your present trouble—well, everything. Of course," he added in alarm, as if fearing they might not understand, "it was I who impressed on your unconscious minds the desire to hypnotize me. Quite naturally there was a hypnotic flashback. It's all very simple—though come to think of it," he said naively, "you haven't anything like that in your civilization."

Carson stared at him in fascination. "Well," he said uncertainly, "I guess we better get a move on, eh?"

"You mean we should try to escape from the starbers. Well—I suppose so. We'll make a few more diverging paths, but eventually the beasts will catch up with us when we drop from exhaustion." He made a grave clipping motion with two fingers.

Debtree looked sick. He and Carson fell in behind the other. They ran for a half hour, occasionally spreading out, thus giving the beasts more enigmatic decisions to make.

They stopped at last, their labored breathing showing white in the chill air. "Now," Carson said determinedly. "Instead of dropping from exhaustion, why can't we make it back to where you live? To your city?"

"Because I have no city," the other answered sadly. He hunkered down on his haunches, and made doodling motions in the snow. He seemed not in the least alarmed about his coming death. "I have no people. I'm an outcast. Were I to return, I'd meet as sure a death as at the hands of the starbers? Or should I say the clippers of the starbers? Gruesome implements."

He sighed. "Ah well. We may as well divert ourselves until the starbers reach us. Be rather unpleasant, don't you think?" he asked mildly.

He thought about this for awhile, still drawing designs. He said at last, "I was unfortunate enough to be born a prince, my friends. Yesterday—although we have no such thing as day or night, since our whole civilization is in the interior of the planet—so I think it was yesterday—"

He frowned, his peculiarly formed lips

moving as if counting. "Yes, it was yesterday that the opposing faction overthrew the royal house and slaughtered my mother and father. Everyone in my family was killed. My name, by the way, is Stoc. My first name, that is. The rest of it would save you."

"Doubtless," said Debtree, as if fascinated.

"So that's the way it was. The whole world is in the enemy's hands. I escaped through hole number ten. I thought it might be more dignified to die at the clippers of the starbers. Though, of course, the henshi birds might get us first. Or maybe we'll freeze to death."

Carson said very softly, eyes glittering, "If you can't go back, why can't you direct us to hole number ten and let us go inside the planet and get the help we need?"

"They'd kill you. Anything from outside is inimical. You wouldn't have a chance. And then again, if anybody in our civilization knew about such things—about atoms and macro-universe and things like that, it would be I. Although I do come from

a long royal line, most of us, with the exception of myself, were dabblers in science. All that knowledge and experience has been handed down to me, from innumerable ancestors. It makes education such a simple thing. Hypnosis, you know."

"Why can't you help us then?" Carson said tensely.

"I?" Stoc was astonished. "Why, because all that inherited knowledge is submerged in my unconscious mind." He made a last, slow, doodling mark in the snow. Then, surprisingly, he leaped to his feet. "Why, perhaps I *can* help you!" he exclaimed, his eyes amazed. "I just had a thought! An ancestral memory—that's what it must have been. Up is down! Come, we must find our way back to your ship!"

He started off, and then stopped and turned, his eyes hopeless. "But what good will it do you two?" he exclaimed. "Debtree, if you arrive safely back in your world, Carson will arrive with you, and you won't have the lovely Bernie to yourself. And Carson, if Debtree arrives back

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with you, then he will still forbid you to marry Bernie. It doesn't make sense. Perhaps you should fight," he suggested, "and one of you kill the other."

Debtree's face, cold as marble, now turned red. "Shut up!" he said.

Carson's voice was quiet as he interrupted, "Lead the way, Stoc." He didn't look at Debtree. Stoc shrugged his shoulders doubtfully, and started off.

AFTER half an hour had passed, the starbers swished past, their one-track minds intent on the original trail. Carson saw them stop at a three-way fork, but only for a minute. This time the leader quickly decided on the central path. They were learning.

They found their own footprints in the snow to follow back to the ship, and Stoc kept the lead, running effortlessly. Debtree was wobbling. Carson knew he himself was winded.

After an hour of this, they stopped, and Carson shook out some dehydrated foods. He panted at Stoc, "You say you've discovered something that will save us?"

"I don't know. But never mind. The complete thought is sure to jump out of my mind sooner or later. In the meantime, we must get back—that is, it seems somehow that we're supposed to go to the ship." He cudgeled his head despairingly. "This memory! This ancestral thought, if it would only come more clearly!"

The worst happened as they trudged on again. The sky became darker. A spurt of wind lifted snow from the ground, and then was a howling demon whipping around their ears with an incredibly cold bite.

"The starbers will get us," Stoc said philosophically.

"If we don't watch out," Carson muttered. But he suspected the truth. Snow, thick and hard, began to smash down from the sky. The circle of vision was limited to twenty feet. It became increasingly difficult to pick out their footprints. Carson, in panic, got down on his knees and crawled, blowing snow from their tracks. He felt as if he were stiff to the bone. Finally, he knew it was hopeless. On hands

and knees, a dark shadow against driving white, his exhausted lungs vainly blew. The footprints were gone. He rolled over to a sitting position as Stoc and Debtree came trudging up. They knew from his expression that they were lost.

"Well," said Stoc sadly, "we won't freeze anyway—the starbers will find us before that. They'll still be able to feel our prints. Then they'll go on to the ship, hack their way through. That'll be the end of Carson's sweetheart."

Debtree was now sitting on the snow, hugging himself up against the wind. He looked at Stoc. "She's not his sweetheart," he chattered.

"But she loves him," Stoc answered quietly.

"She's just a half-grown kid! She doesn't know what she wants! She'll get Carson over my dead body!"

Debtree buried his head in his hands with a groan. "What does it matter, anyway?" he choked.

Stoc sighed, and turned as if looking for sight of the starbers.

"Ed!"

Carson, standing in moody silence, turned violently. "I heard my name!" he gasped.

He took a half-dozen steps into the driving snow. The cry came again, forlorn, muted by the howl of the wind.

A mad excitement took hold of him. "Bernie!" he yelled. "Bernie!"

Within minutes, she came stumbling into the circle of vision and fell into Carson's arms, babbling out her hysterical relief. Carson thrust her away.

"You shouldn't have done it, he raged, driven mad by the thought that now she also would die.

She held up her mittened hand. He saw the insulated end of a thin copper wire. "The other end is attached to the ship! I knew that if you were on the way back for any reason, you'd be lost. Aren't you glad to see me?"

Carson hugged her fervently, and cried into the background distance, "Too bad, starbers! Not this time!"

**B**ACK in the ship, Bernie fixed hot liquids and turned the heater up. Stoc drank coffee with a surprised, appreciative expression on his peculiar face. Carson, feeling like a new man, was watching Stoc closely.

So were Debtree and Bernie. They had explained to her what had happened on their trip.

Stoc saw their eyes on him, and flushed painfully. He pounded at his forehead with the heel of his hand. "This ancestral memory!" he moaned. "It eludes me. And I am confused. Carson," he implored, "I am confused. Which way is up? Which way is down?"

Carson very slowly repeated the theory.

Stoc breathed his relief. "I thought so. Then it is perfectly plain to me that in order to arrive back at your macro-universe, we must go down."

Bernie looked at him. "But our universe is up!"

"Nevertheless, we will go down. I, Stoc, say it. Or rather, it is my ancestral memory

that says it. I hope my ancestor was right," he added dubiously. Then, "You might as well trust my ancestral memory as anything else. This head of mine!"

He struck at it helplessly.

There was nothing else for it. For some unknown reason, the reducer machinery would not reverse itself. There was only one way to go: down. Carson grimly set the machinery in motion. Mountains grew around them. Then other mountains. Those gave way to frightful empty vistas streaked with motes of fire.

Another world grew around them, and expanded. Universes within universes, unendingly!

"But does it ever stop?" Bernie asked, her voice thin with the raw edge of hysteria.

Stoc pounded at his forehead in distress. "That is it!" he exclaimed. "That is just the point. What is the smallest particle? How can there be a smallest particle? Where does matter come from? For if there is an ultimate particle, is it not

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also composed of other particles? Oh, the question is vexing. This ancestral memory of mine!"

"It's like the end of space," Debtree muttered. "You can't visualize it."

"The end of space! Somehow this ancestral memory is bound up with that." Stoc's eyes closed in intense thought, as the ship descended. . . .

And then something peculiar happened.

Outside was what might have been interplanetary space. Suns stretched in blazing panorama. But where, a second before, those stars had been expanding, now they were—contracting!

Carson's chair clattered back. "It's reversing!" he gasped.

Debtree took one look, and his jaw fell in stunned amazement. "It couldn't—" His voice was chopped off by an invisible guillotine.

Bernie said faintly, "You go down in order to go up—"

Behind them Stoc elbowed into their midst. His eyes shone. "Yes," she shouted. "Yes! One goes down so far, and while going down, one starts to go up. It is happening. Praise be to my ancestor—he was right!"

"But we're contradicting the laws of—" Carson began frantically.

"And why not? The universe itself is a contradiction, because it must explain its own existence. And what is it that explains its own existence best of all? A circle! It has its own beginning and its own end, and they fade into each other.

"So it is with the universe. One travels in a straight line and one arrives back where he started. So your Einstein says. And my ancestor says that if one travels downward in size, one will eventually arrive back to his original size. How else will we explain the end of matter? It has no end. It is a circle. Its end and its beginning are contained in each other. And there is the proof. The universe is again contracting. The reducing machinery is taking us down—in an upward direction! The circle of size! Is it clear?"

His face fell when they looked at him blankly. "I thought not," he said with regret. "It's not clear to me either. But it

is obviously the truth. Carson, you must continue to reduce the ship. Eventually, we will return to the starting point!" Then, subtly, a shadow of foreboding touched his small, mobile eyes. "And now my ancestor is telling me something else. . . .

WHAT that something else was they did not learn until hours later. Universes had flowed together, producing the effect of still more contracting stars, and worlds. They were expanding, without question of doubt, following a paradoxical downward trail.

But suddenly, though the reducer machinery still hummed, the ship stopped. The stars were neither contracting nor expanding.

Carson's face grayed. He looked at Debtree and Bernie. Carson said, framing the words slowly, "Bernie, get Stoc. He's been in the kitchen with paper and pencil for the last six hours. He's probably got the answer to this one, too."

Stoc did have the answer.

He stood looking at Carson and Debtree, his eyes enigmatic. He rustled the papers in his hands. They were filled with long columns of hieroglyphs—probably the figures of his own language.

"I was hoping this wouldn't happen," he said sorrowfully. "But it has. And now we must face the consequences. We are very near in size to your macro-universe, but the reducing machinery is working futilely against an inexorable cosmic law. The Law of Conservation of Volume. Such was my ancestor's knowledge, who imparted it to his son, and his son, until at last it came to me."

Debtree wet his lips. "You mean we're taking more volume back to our universe than we brought with us?"

"That is precisely it."

Debtree's breathing was gusty. "You're the extra volume, Stoc!"

Carson made an angry motion, but Stoc stopped him. He told Debtree carefully. "I am partly the extra volume. There is more. It is unfortunate that when the lovely one," he smiled gently at Bernie, "landed the ship on my world, she had no means to make sure that the molecules

of my world, and the molecules of the ship, would conform in size. They didn't. With the reducer machinery shut off, the molecules of the ship immediately started to make a readjustment. They absorbed energy from my world in order to stabilize themselves. That energy would later be changed into volume when the reducer machinery was turned on again. You see? So we have too much volume."

Debtrees eyes lighted with inspiration. "We'll throw things out of the airlock!"

Stoc smiled at him pityingly. "No. You forget we are hanging in what is virtually interplanetary space. Furthermore, we have no space units. Who will throw things out of the airlock, without dying himself from the lack of air?"

His voice was a loud drum in the seething silence. He said carefully, "I will have to ask you how much you weigh, Debtrees."

Debtrees eyes were wide. He said hoarsely, "We could use the rocket blasts. We could find a habitable world—"

"No. You forget that we would have to go down to find it. And we are already going down—in an upward fashion. One can follow the circle of size in only one direction. We're stuck here, until we get rid of extra mass."

Debtrees said reluctantly, "One hundred and fifty."

"Carson?"

"One sixty five."

"I weigh 1703 inals," said Stoc. "Translated, that is one hundred thirty pounds."

Sudden tears came to Bernies eyes. "I'm in this too," she cried. "Don't you dare leave me out! I weigh a hundred and five—"

"Your weight lets you out, lovely one. The exact extra mass is one hundred and forty-five pounds. The loss of a little extra volume of course will not matter—otherwise one could never travel into smallness at all."

He watched Debtrees and Carson narrowly. They were avoiding each other's gaze.

Stoc laughed, rustling his papers. His eyes were shadowed. "It's not so bad, this dying, when one does it for someone else. You agree with me, Debtrees?"

Debtrees looked sick. "Yes," he whispered. Then, more loudly, "Yes, When one does it for someone else."

"Good!" Stocs voice was almost cheerful. "Carson, Bernie, Debtrees—I think we had all better sleep. Later, our minds will be clearer, and we will be able to choose that one of us who will sacrifice himself for the good of all."

So authoritative and crystal clear was his personality, that they all obeyed him without question.

There were six cabins that Debtrees had built into the ship, in forethought of a possible time to come when regular trips might be made to the worlds of smallness. Carson, closing the heavy door behind him, thought over the original purpose for which he had been hired by Debtrees. To find out if the ship would truly work. To discover any possible pitfalls. Pitfalls! They'd run up against them with a vengeance.

On the next trip up there would have to be provisions made to take care of the change in volume.

But Carson, lying tensely on the bed, knew that he would never make another trip. And he could not even tell Bernies good-by. She might try to stop him. . . .

**A**FTER an hour, he rose quietly, his shoes off and pushed the door open. He went padding down the lighted tunnel toward the airlock at the end of the ship. He hesitated a long moment, closing his eyes and gathering courage. It was hard to leave it, Bernie.

There was the scuff of a footstep behind him. He whirled. Debtrees stood there, looking at him grimly.

"Don't try to do it again, Carson," the scientist bit out. "I'm on to that sacrifice angle of yours by this time."

Carsons eyebrows shot up. "You're not intending to—"

"Yes. I am. Out of my way." There were white ridges along Debtrees jaw. "I've got my own reasons. Bernie doesn't love me. She loves you. I'm deadwood. Furthermore—well—" he jerked his head

"I figure it's about time I was waking up to myself. Some of the things you've said about me aren't exactly untrue. I

guess it takes a tough situation to show a man up for what he really is. Out there on the snow, I wasn't so heroic, was I?" He scowled bitterly. "Get back to your cabin. I'm giving you Bernie, and I'm giving you your life."

Carson said softly, "No. I've been in retreat from life for a good many years. So I'll make a thorough retreat and save three lives in the bargain."

Carson made a fist, measured the distance, and brought his fist up. Debtree crumpled and fell. Carson looked down at him, breathing hard. Then, hurriedly, he worked the controls of the airlock. The inner door swung open. Carson gasped. The airlock light was on!

Stoc was standing there. He smiled gently. His hand reached forward, barely touched Carson's temple. As before, his eyes turned fiery, and, as in the previous strange reverse hypnosis, Carson lost consciousness. He retained one peculiar memory. On the airlock at Stoc's feet was a sealed cardboard carton labeled "Peaches" . . .

**H**IS eyes seemed to open immediately. Bernie was kneeling over him, bathing his flushed face with a wet cloth.

Tears were running down her cheeks. She wailed, "Oh, Ed, he's gone! He's gone!"

Debtree had gained consciousness sooner than Carson. The man's eyes were shadowed. He seemed lost in pensiveness, little white hollows bracketing his lips. He nodded slowly and said, "He went out the airlock."

Carson came to his feet. Debtree had a slip of paper in his shaking hand. He said, "Stoc left a note. It was on the floor. It applies to all three of us." His voice was bitter with regret.

The reducer machinery was humming. Carson looked toward the starboard port next to the airlock. Stars were contracting, bunching together to form other stars. They were on the way up again, back to the Earth.

Carson took the note. He read it out loud, his voice a strained mumble that shook a bit.

My friends: My apologies to Carson for hypnotizing him. And my apologies to Debtree for insinuating that since he was the right weight, he should be the one to go. As a matter of fact, being without ties myself, and having nothing conceivable to live for, I knew that I was the logical choice. However, the purpose of my deception was to acquaint each of you with the qualities of the other. Does either think the other is a coward now? I believe not. Is there hatred now? I believe not. Men are tried in strange crucibles, and my plan worked out well, far better than I expected. I believe even Debtree will admit that Carson is well suited to marry the lovely Bernie. I, Stoc, ask it. That's all. I have borrowed a carton of peaches, my friends, to make up for the extra weight. It will go out the airlock with me.

Carson blinked rapidly, and looked up. "It's signed, 'Stoc'," he said.

"And now he's dead," Bernie broke into a sob, and shuddered against Carson. Carson looked at Debtree over her shoulder. "We'll get back safely?"

Debtree made a jerking motion toward the port. Carson saw dwindling mountains—and suddenly, far off in the gray distance, great precipices. Debtree said, "That's the laboratory. Another minute—"

They stood looking at each other now, voicelessly. All the old antagonism died then, for good. Carson felt it, and saw it in the unashamed, unflinching expression in Debtree's eyes. The man's hand came out slowly, and they shook.

Debtree said softly, "Men are tried in strange crucibles, aren't they? That's what Stoc said, Carson. Everything else he said goes, too. About Bernie." His eyes were sharp, questioning. He grinned tightly. "You know what I mean? It's all right. And when we get things started, I want you to go in with me on the atomship corporation."

He turned quickly away. The walls of the laboratory drew nearer. Debtree went forward to switch off the controls. Outside, the vista was permanent. They had returned. For a long time, however, they made no move to leave the ship. They were thinking of Stoc. Carson closed his eyes, and again saw the being's strangely gentle smile . . . and the odd conviction swept over him that Stoc was not really dead.

He still lived and was with them—if only in their minds. . . .

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### AS PRIZEWINNER.

A young man wrote us only last week: "For two years I entered competitions without luck, but since getting Joan the Wad I have frequently been successful although I have not won a big prize, but I know that—, who won £2,000 in a competition, has one because I gave it to him. When he won his £2,000, he gave me £100 for myself, so you see I have cause to bless 'Queen Joan.'"

JOAN THE WAD'S achievements are unique. Never before was such a record placed before the Public. Ask yourself if you have ever heard of anything so stupendous. You have not. Results are what count, and these few Extracts from actual letters are typical of the many hundreds that are received, and from which we shall publish selections from time to time. We unreservedly GUARANTEE that these letters were absolutely spontaneous, and the originals are open to inspection at JOAN'S COTTAGE. Send at once for full information about this PROVED Luck Bringer. You, too, may benefit in Health, Wealth and Happiness to an amazing extent.

### "SUNDAY GRAPHIC" PICTURE PUZZLE.

No. 175.—"Dear Joan the Wad, I received this week cheque for £71. 8s. 7d. My share of the £1,000 Prize of the 'Sunday Graphic' Picture Puzzle. I have been near winning before, but you have brought me just the extra luck I wanted."—F. T. Salisbury.

### WON £153. 17s. THEN £46. 10s. 3d.

No. 191.—"Genuine account of Luck... since receiving Joan the Wad... I was successful in winning £153. 17s. in the 'People's Word No. 280, £46. 10s. 3d. also £1 on a football coupon, which is amazing in itself, as all the luck came in one week."—A. B., Leamington Spa.

### WINNERS OF £6. 11s. 1d.

No. 195.—"My father, myself and my sister had the pleasure of winning a Crossword Puzzle in the 'Sunday Pictorial,' which came to £6. 11s. 1d., which we put down to JOAN THE WAD, and we thank her very much."—L. B., Exning.

### WON PRIZE OF £13. 13s.

No. 214.—"Arrival of your charm followed the very next day by the notification that I had won a prize of £13. 13s. in a Literary Competition."—F. H. R., Wallington.

### "DAILY HERALD" PICTURE CONTEST.

No. 216.—"Since having received JOAN THE WAD I received cheque, part share in the 'Daily Herald' Picture Contest, £3. 15s."—M. F., Notting Hill.

# JOAN THE WAD

is the Lucky Cornish Piskey

who Sees All, Hears All, Does All.

JOAN THE WAD is Queen of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys. Thousands of persons all over the world claim that Joan the Wad has brought them Wonderful Luck in the way of Health, Wealth and Happiness.

### HISTORY FREE FOR A STAMP.

If you will send me your name and address, a 1/- stamp and a stamped addressed envelope for reply, I will send you a history of the Cornish Piskey folk, and the marvellous miracles they accomplish. JOAN THE WAD is the QUEEN of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys, and with whom good luck and good health always attend.

### AS HEALER.

One Lady writes: "My sister suffered very badly for years, but since I gave her a Joan the Wad to keep near her she is much easier. Do you think this is due to Joan or the Water from the lucky Well?"

### AS MATCHMAKER.

A young girl wrote and informed me that she had had scores of boy friends, but it was not until she had visited Cornwall and taken Joan back with her that she met the boy of her dreams, and as they got better acquainted she discovered he also has Joan the Wad.

### AS SPECULATOR.

A man writes: "I had some shares that for several years I couldn't give away. They were 1/- shares and all of a sudden they went up in the market so I happened to be staring at Joan the Wad. Pure imagination, you may say, but I thought I saw her wink approvingly. I sold out, reinvested the money at greater profit and have prospered ever since."

### £30,000 WINNER.

No. 222.—"Mrs. A. . . . of Lewisham, has just won £30,000 and says she has a JOAN THE WAD, so please send one to me."—Mrs. V., Bromley.

### FIRST PRIZE "NUGGETS."

No. 238.—"I have had some good luck since receiving JOAN THE WAD. I have won First Prize in 'ANSWERS' 'Nuggets.' I had JOAN THE WAD in February, and I have been lucky ever since."—Mrs. N. W., Wolverhampton.

### WON "DAILY MIRROR" HAMPER.

No. 245.—"I have just had my first win since having JOAN THE WAD, which was a 'DAILY MIRROR' HAMPER."—E. M. F., Brentwood.

### WON "NUGGETS" £300.

No. 257.—"My husband is a keen Competitor in 'Bullets' and 'Nuggets.' He had not any luck until I gave him JOAN THE WAD, when the first week he secured a credit note in 'Nuggets' and last week FIRST Prize in 'Nuggets' £300."—Mrs. A. B., Salford.

### CAN ANYONE BEAT THIS?

No. 256.—"Immediately after receiving my JOAN THE WAD I won a 3rd Prize in a local Derby Sweep, then I was given employment after seven months of idleness and finally had a correct forecast in Picture Puzzle 'Glasgow Sunday Mail,' which entitles me to a share of the Prize Money."—W. M., Glasgow, C.4.

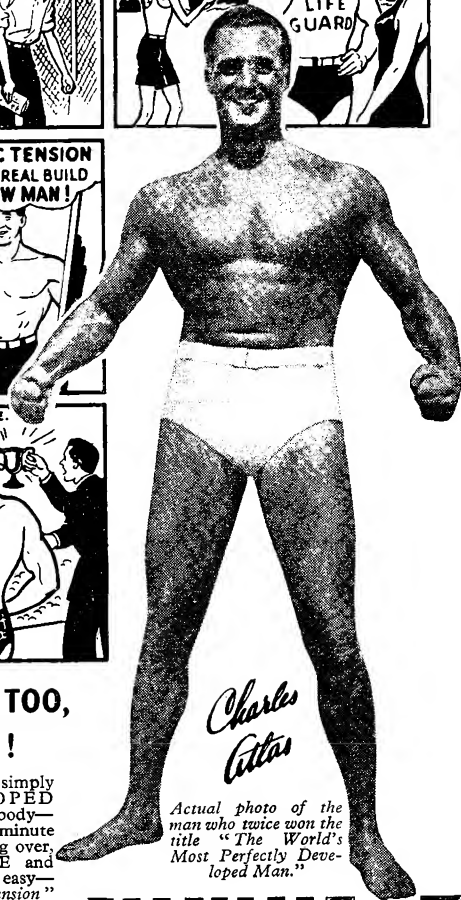
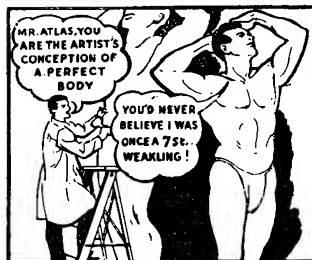
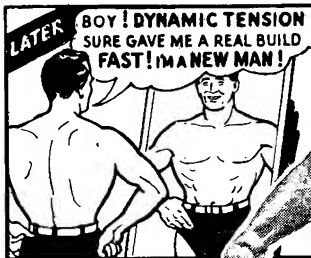
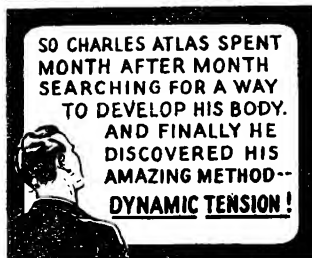
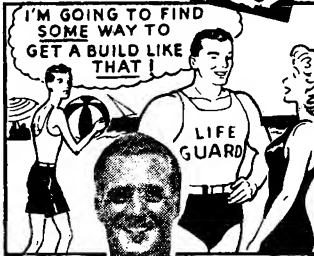
All you have to do is to send a 1/- stamp and a stamped addressed envelope for the history to

**33, JOAN'S COTTAGE, LANIVET, BODMIN, CORNWALL.**

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**CHARLES ATLAS**



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IN ONLY 15 MINUTES A DAY!**

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In only 15 minutes a day "Dynamic-Tension" can bulge up your chest, broaden your back, fill out your arms and legs. Before you know it, this easy, NATURAL method will make you a New Man! I guarantee you'll see results in the first 7 days! I give you no gadgets